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The Government and Politics of the Nordic Countries

Olof Petersson

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OF THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

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Translated by Frank Gabriel Perry

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Address:
CE Fritzes AB
Box 6472
S-113 82 Stockholm, Sweden

Orders:
Fritzes
S-106 47 Stockholm, Sweden
Telephone: +46 8 690 90 90, Fax: +46 8 20 50 21,

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I

The Beginning of Things . . .

When the Nordic peoples first appeared out of the darkness of pre-history, they were governed by the legal relations of their tribal and kinship systems. Although the documentary sources are incomplete, we do know that the *Thing* (Modern Scandinavian *ting*), or deliberative assembly, played an important role in this process. It was the task of the *Thing* to settle disputes, to pass sentence on law-breakers, and to elect kings. *Things* were held both within smaller districts, and whole regions (the *landsting* of Sweden, the *lagting* of Norway; the Icelandic *Althing* first assembled in AD 930 or thereabouts). During the Viking period *Things* were also held in England, Scotland, Ireland, the Isle of Man, the Hebrides, the Shetland and Orkney Islands, the Faroes and in Greenland. The *Things* were held at regular intervals, in the open and at a set location. All free men were entitled to take part. According to a number of sources, decisions were arrived at once the chieftain or the *Lagman* (the “lawman” or chief judge) had first given his opinion which was received in silence, or with a faint murmuring if the assembled gathering held a different view, or by the raising of weapons if they agreed with the verdict. It would be anachronistic to speak here of democracy. Firstly, not all the adult population could participate, as women and serfs were excluded. Secondly, power was far from evenly distributed. The balance shifted in favour of well-off farmers and magnates at an early stage. The *Things* in Norway and Iceland in particular were dominated by the chieftains. Where terrain and distance made travelling difficult, it was normal to send a smaller number of representatives to the *Thing*.

The Nordic *Things* bore all the hallmarks of an older Germanic legal system. The division of a later age between legislative and judicial pow-

ers has no relevance here. Law and verdict were one and the same. Rendering judgement was the heart of the matter, the *Things* were first and foremost courts of law. Justice was considered eternal and unchanging. It was the task of the *Thing* to pass sentence on anyone who broke the law or the peace. New laws were only created as new means of interpreting and implementing timeless legal principles. The role of the *Lagman* was crucial. It was he who took the law forward and set new precedents.

The Powers of the King and the Nobility

The Middle Ages saw the advent of a new concept of law. The law was no longer seen as eternal but temporary, not something to be passively interpreted but a matter for active legislation. The rise of the Church introduced canon law. The right of the Pope to issue encyclicals and decrees on church matters found an echo in temporal life. The king began to issue orders and set the rules, he gained the right to command obedience and kept his ancient responsibility for the maintenance of law and order. The increasing power of the monarchy brought with it a new challenge to the ancient *Things*. When the ruling kings started to be crowned at the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century, this was held to symbolise the fact that they ruled by the grace of God. New principles were being introduced while ancient ones were still in force.

The rivalry between monarch and *Thing* was transformed into a conflict between the magnates and the monarch. The crucial question was whether the king was to be appointed by election or by right of inheritance. In the beginning the *Things* had great influence on the election of kings. In Denmark the various *landsting* appointed the king. The Swedish king was elected at the field of Mora outside Uppsala and then made a triumphal procession to the various ends of the country to be approved by acclamation. In the middle of the fourteenth century Finland's right to participate in the election of the Swedish king was recognised. The Norwegian king was chosen by an electoral college that consisted of the bishops and the leading magnates. Since the selection was often restricted to the members of a particular dynasty, the real influence of the *Things* came to be limited. Norway became an hereditary monarchy as early as 1260, but the kings of Sweden were still formally elected until

1544 and in Denmark until 1660. The importance of the *Things* for the government of the nation was on the wane. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw the development of a diet of the nobility (known in Sweden as *herredag* and in Norway as *riksmøte*), as a means for the nobility and the church to participate with the king in making decisions which were binding throughout the realm. The Danish equivalent, the *danehof*, was the instrument used by the nobility to exercise their rule. In Sweden and Norway, where geographical conditions made it more difficult to bring together representatives of the various parts of the country, power soon shifted to a permanent council, or *curia regia*. During periods when the power of the king was weak – when, for example, the monarch was a minor – it was this council that exercised real power.

Among the ancient powers of the *Thing* was that of deposing the monarch, “Swedes have the power to appoint the king as well as depose him”, as is stated in the Västergötland Law of the thirteenth century. The election of the monarch was held to be conditional. The monarch was forced to agree to certain restrictions on his freedom of action. These royal guarantees, known in Denmark as the *håndfæstninger*, came to be of enormous importance in later Nordic traditions of constitutional law. The oath of kingship was a kind of contract (to use a more modern term) which regulated the mutual obligations between the ruler and his subjects. The people swore to obey the king but their personal and economic freedom from the arbitrary exercise of power by the centre was guaranteed in recompense. The people also reserved for themselves the right to approve any new taxes.

In Iceland these developments took, to some extent at least, a form all their own. The Norwegian founding fathers established a form of government based on the power of the magnates and the Icelanders were never to have a king of their own. During the latter half of the thirteenth century Iceland came under Norwegian sovereignty. The *Althing* continued to exist but its members were appointed by the Norwegian king, none of which stopped Icelandic farmers from continuing to attend the sessions of the *Althing*.

As for Norway, its evolution towards political independence was checked in the fourteenth century when the country entered a union, first with Sweden for several years, then from 1380 with Denmark. For many years the specific implications of the long union of Denmark and Norway were the subject of a great many disputes. In foreign affairs Norway was frequently deemed to be a separate country and a separate

Norwegian ministerial council existed for many years. But over the centuries Norway came to be tied more and more closely to Denmark in constitutional matters.

During this period the feudal system had come to dominate Europe and feudal principles were to affect the Nordic countries in varying degrees. The hierarchical principle with its system of vassals and the right of inheritance of feudal dues and obligations was of greatest importance in Denmark. Feudalism came late to Sweden and had only marginal effects on that country. In those countries where feudalism held sway, the freedom of the peasants was suppressed. In Denmark the peasant-farmer was made relatively subservient to his noble lord. Only in a few parts of Europe – in England, Switzerland, Sweden, and some of the Netherlandic provinces – did the older traditions of popular government continue to exist in unbroken form.

National Popular Assemblies

The fifteenth century saw the establishment of an important institution: the assembly of the Estates. Both the clergy and the nobility each formed their own Estates and the nascent middle class was also represented. Farmers formed an Estate of their own in Sweden, but lacked any political clout in Denmark. From the outset the powers of the assembly of the Estates were vague and their sessions were irregular. They were convened when the king or the council needed support. This usually meant the approval of taxes for the financing of military expeditions, which had become more and more expensive as a consequence of the development of new weaponry. The meetings of the Estates, which evolved into parliaments and were organised on a more permanent basis, may have had some notional link with the ancient *Things* – the representatives of the farmers were often appointed by the meetings of the local *Thing*. But it is historically incorrect to see the parliamentary assemblies as direct descendants of the *Things*. The assemblies of the Estates were established on new principles and had a much broader range of duties than the *Things*. In Iceland, where there is a stronger historical continuity between the medieval and the modern *Althing*, the process of constitutional development was interrupted by the influence of foreign powers.

Denmark entered a new constitutional era when absolutism was in-

roduced in 1660, after defeat in the war against Sweden. As a result Denmark had neither a ministerial council, Estates, nor any other form of popular representation. The king was no longer bound by any form of *håndfæstning*, but ruled instead absolutely. No other ruler in Europe enjoyed as much power as that given to the Danish king by the Act of Royalty of 1665. In terms of political power it was the nobility who were most immediately affected as their privileges were curtailed. However, when considered against the general political background of Europe as a whole, the powers of the Danish monarch were in no way unique. Throughout Europe the principles of absolutism were being turned into reality.

In Sweden some concentration of power to the monarch did take place but the period of absolute monarchy was comparatively short (between 1680 and 1718). Farmers continued to be represented in the Parliament of the Estates and the nobility were never given, as was the case in other feudal countries, independent power of judgement over their subjects. Royal absolutism in Sweden, as in other countries, was frequently aimed at the power of the nobility. In Sweden the monarch and the farmers often found themselves in a coalition against the nobles. Nevertheless the period of Great Power status meant that popular influence on the government of the nation was suppressed to the utmost degree. It is a matter of historical record that it was during this period that the apparatus of the Swedish state was established. On those occasions when the king as head of the armed forces was out of the country, the government was temporarily in the hands of the Council. Colleges and central offices were set up. New kinds of public official joined the sheriff and the clerk. Rules and regulations were introduced to govern the powers of these new offices. The distribution of their responsibilities was more clearly defined and the hierarchical ordering of higher and lower authorities was entrenched.

Challenges to the Power of the King

Constitutional changes kept pace with the shifting balance of power. During periods when the power of the monarch was weak, the nobility were able to set their stamp on the structure of government. In the Swedish constitutional law known as the Instrument of Government (*Rege-*

ringsform) of 1634, the powers of government were vested during the minority of the ruler in the holders of the five highest offices of state. The rights of the Estates were entrenched although more precise ordinances governing legislative powers were lacking. The importance of this Instrument of Government lay not least in that the powers and responsibilities of the organs of the state were regulated by law. The constitutional principle had been proclaimed in opposition to the absolute.

Gradually the part played by the Estates in the government of Sweden changed. The role of the Estates had been seen in former times as primarily passive, embodying the ancient notion of the right of opposition of the people. But little by little the representatives of the Estates came to enjoy a more active role. In conjunction with the king, the parliament became part of the organs of government of the country. This twofold identity was echoed in the way the nature of the representative's task was seen. For many years the appointed burgesses and farmers were seen as representatives of their own cities and rural districts. One example of this was the way in which petitions were presented to the king by representatives of particular parts of the country or particular Estates. In some instances representatives were seen as being bound by an imperative mandate and therefore forced to follow the wishes of their mandators. Subsequently the doctrine of the free mandate prevailed and the member of the Parliament of the Estates was supposed to represent the interests of the whole country at his own discretion.

In the vacuum that developed with the fall of the Caroline Absolutism, the Estates grasped the initiative. The parliament elected a new monarch who undertook to govern and rule in accordance with the principles of government stipulated by parliament. The Instruments of Government of 1719 and 1720 laid down the constitutional foundations of rule by the Estates during the Age of Liberty. Although the monarchy and the Council were retained, parliament became the dominant organ of government. Parliament did not just legislate and make the decisions about state finances, but was also involved in preferments and matters of every kind. A form of party structure developed as groups of like-thinking members joined together in various clubs. The Council was dependent on the Estates and as the parliament had the power to force individual members of the Council out of office, it may be justified to see this as a primitive form of modern parliamentarism. The powers of the monarch were declining in importance. When the king refused to assent to their decisions, the Estates gave the Council the right to use the royal

stamp and so sign them into law. In the Act of 1766 on the Freedom of the Press, censorship was abolished (except for theological writings) and free debate was made easier.

Although the forms of government of the Age of Liberty prefigure modern notions of democracy in many respects, they were not without their negative aspects as well. Financial mismanagement, bribery, and dependence on foreign powers meant that rule by the Estates was not to survive. The degree to which the parliaments of the Estates were truly representative must also be open to question. The Estates of the nobility as well as the burghers and the clergy had become increasingly bureaucratic. They were dominated by public officials of the state and from the cities. During the latter phase of this period, parliament became a kind of governmental ministry with a complex network of committees, departmental offices, and deputations. The farmers' Estate continued to play a subordinate role; the farmers were excluded from the most important body of the parliament, the Secret Committee.

As a reaction to the rule of the Estates during the Age of Liberty, the powers of the Swedish monarch were strengthened. According to the Instrument of Government of 1772 it was the king who governed the realm; the Council was to be appointed by the king. A parliament was only to be convoked every sixth year. The status of the Estates was further diminished in 1789 by the plans of Gustav III for major reforms of government and by the King's Act of Union and Security.

The Separation of Powers

By 1808–1809 Gustavian government had reached the point of no return. Defeat at the hands of Russia and the loss of Finland made the crisis acute. The King was deposed and a new constitution was created. This new constitution bore the stamp both of domestic traditions and ideas from abroad. Montesquieu's doctrine of the separation of powers could be easily recognised in the distinction drawn between executive power (the king), legislative power (parliament) and judicial power (independent law courts). However, the principle of the separation of powers was not implemented in an entirely consistent manner. Legislative power, for example, was vested in king and parliament together. In the celebrated words of the memorandum drawn up by the Constitutional

Committee, the ruling or executive power was to be characterised by “unity of decision and full force in the execution thereof”, while the legislative body was to be “slow to act but steadfast and determined in obstruction”. The king was, however, not to rule alone but enjoined to call on the members of the Council of State for information and advice. The members of the State Council were appointed and dismissed by the king, but their independence was underlined in that they were enjoined to indicate an opposing view, if they held one, in the official records of the Council. Parliament was given some freedom to oversee the workings of the Council, but the status of the Estates depended on their control over taxation and the state purse. The growth of new and unrepresented groups of the population led to discussions on a reform of parliament; however, the established system of the four Estates was retained for the time being.

When in 1809 Finland came under Russian dominion, the country was, nevertheless, allowed to keep its own laws, system of justice, and administration. The Russian Czar declared at the parliamentary assembly held in Borgå in 1809 that Finland was to be considered an autonomous state and that its people had been “raised to the company of nations”. In this way the constitution then in force, the Swedish *Regeringsform* of 1772, came to remain in effect until 1919. However, the Finnish Estates and the *Lantdag*, their parliament, were not to be assembled for more than fifty years. The Grand Duchy of Finland was governed by a senate and its members were appointed by the Czar. The Governor-General was a Russian.

For a century and a half Norway was ruled by the absolute monarchy of the Danes. Under the terms of the Treaty of Kiel of 1814, Denmark was forced to surrender Norway to Sweden. (Greenland, the Faroes, and Iceland remained, however, under Danish rule.) Norway did not accede to the Treaty of Kiel but proclaimed itself an independent state. A national assembly held at Eidsvold adopted a constitution which was signed on 17 May 1814. The following day the King was elected. The Eidsvold constitution bore clear signs of the influence of three ideas then current: the sovereignty of the people, the principle of the separation of powers, and the idea of individual rights and freedoms. Legislative power was vested in the *Storting*, the parliament elected by the people. The king was given a suspensive veto only (three identical votes of the *Storting* could override the king's veto). The popular basis of the *Storting* was at that time still disproportionate: the franchise was effectively re-

stricted to public officials, urban businessmen, and farmers (though there were no restrictions relating to the size of their property). This excluded several major population groups that were on the increase during the nineteenth century, such as agricultural and industrial workers, sailors and servants. The separation of powers followed in principle the same lines as the Swedish constitution of some five years earlier. The rights and freedoms of citizens were protected by special clauses on the freedom of the press, for example, and the prohibition of punishment without trial, as well as a rule on full compensation in cases of expropriation.

After a brief war Sweden compelled Norway to enter into union with her. The two countries were united under a common head of state but the Norwegian constitution of 1814 remained in force though in a restricted form. Conflicts over the implications of this union, not least with regard to Norway's right to its own foreign representation, ultimately led to its disintegration. In 1905 Norway unilaterally declared that it had withdrawn from the union with Sweden, and this decision was confirmed in a referendum held that same year with 368,208 votes for a dissolution of the Union and 184 against. Norway thus became an independent state once more, after more than half a millennium.

Constitutional monarchy, the form of government in Sweden and Norway, was typical for the period. In historical terms this was the usual transitional form between absolute monarchy and democracy. The monarchy retained some of its powers but these were limited by constitutional rules. Two different principles came in conflict here – the sovereignty of the people and the absolute rule of the monarch. The main differences between constitutional monarchy and modern parliamentary democracy were the scale of the restrictions on the franchise and that the government depended for its existence on the king and not parliament.

In constitutional terms, Sweden and Denmark were the antithesis of one another. A despot ruled in Denmark, while the Estates governed Sweden during the Age of Liberty. However, political reality meant that these differences were less pronounced. Just as the Swedish government came to be dominated in practice by public officials, much of the administration of the Danish state was carried out by a professional bureaucracy. Both countries were affected by the growth in importance of the third Estate, the trading middle classes. In Denmark social conditions for the oppressed farming classes were to improve somewhat towards the end of the absolutist period. In Sweden as well as in Denmark-Nor-

way, regional and local authorities enjoyed in practice a relatively large degree of independence. The ability of ordinary people to influence legislation was greatest in Sweden as a consequence of the opportunity to lodge appeals with the farmers' Estate.

Representation

When political institutions in Denmark were finally transformed, the changes were all the more dramatic. In 1849 as a result of the mood of revolution sweeping Europe the country adopted what was at that time the extremely radical June Constitution. The right to vote was extended to almost every male citizen, though not to women; a bicameral parliamentary system was introduced and the powers of the king were limited. Denmark moved directly from absolutism to government based on democratic principles. But this bold step bred its own counter-reaction. The Conservatives pushed through a revision of the constitution in 1866 which restricted the franchise for the upper chamber, the *Landsting*. The *Landsting* came in consequence to be dominated by land-owners and the propertied middle classes.

The representation issue became one of the most hotly debated political problems in the latter half of the nineteenth century in all the Nordic countries. The antiquated Swedish Parliament of the Estates was replaced in 1866 by a bicameral system. But the right to participate in elections was still severely restricted. Social changes in rural areas and the comprehensive transformation of society brought about by industrialisation created a huge proletariat that found itself without political representation. The electoral rules favoured land-owners and those with high incomes. Partial reforms were introduced in Norway in 1884, and in Sweden in 1907. The extension of the franchise to every adult citizen, including women, had to wait until 1913 in Norway, 1915 in Denmark (and therefore in Iceland), and 1921 in Sweden.

Finland was still subject to Russian sovereignty. As a consequence of powerful forces at work for integration within the Russian empire, scope for Finnish autonomy at the turn of the century was reduced. Resistance to Russian domination grew and Finnish autonomy was reinstated during a period of internal disturbance inside Russia. The new parliamentary system adopted in 1906 meant the abolition of the old

Parliament of the Four Estates and that Finland gained at a single stroke the most democratic system of representation in Europe. The franchise was extended to those social groups previously excluded from voting, chief among these being the agricultural and industrial workers. Significantly, women were also given the vote. Direct and proportional elections were introduced for the parliament (*Lantdag*) which henceforth was to consist of a single chamber.

None of this was to mean that the *Lantdag* gained any greater influence over the country's politics. On the contrary interventions on the part of the Russians increased. It was not until the Russian revolution of 1917 that the Finns gained their independence. Russian troops remained in the country and the intensifying conflict between Reds and Whites led to the outbreak of civil war. After the victory of the Whites there was still no agreement on the future shape of the Finnish state but, once Germany had been defeated in the First World War and a parliamentary election held, a republican constitution was adopted. The constitution of 1919 involved a compromise between the demands of the left for a strong parliament and the wish of the right to see an authoritative and independent governing power.

Parliamentary Government

Universal suffrage was introduced in Finland prior to parliamentary government. In the other Nordic countries the process of democratisation took a different course. The parliamentary system had already arrived in Norway by 1884 and this was intimately linked with the efforts of Norwegians to free themselves from Swedish hegemony. The then King of Sweden was forced to accept that the Norwegian government be chosen by representatives of the parties with a majority in the *Storting*. In Denmark a bitter constitutional struggle was to continue for almost thirty years. This struggle for parliamentary government coincided with the conflict between the *Folketing*, parliament's lower chamber elected by universal suffrage, and the *Landsting*, or upper chamber, which was dominated by the Conservatives. It was not until the change of system introduced in 1901 that a government was installed according to parliamentary principles. Even as late as 1920 the Danish King tried to appoint a government which lacked parliamentary support, in what was

Table 1.1 The Historical Development of Universal Suffrage

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
Extension of male suffrage	1849	1906	1874	1814	1866
Female suffrage	1915	1906	1915	1913	1921
Secret ballots	1900	1906	1908	1884	1866
Removal of final barriers in respect of income, wealth etc.	1915	1906	1915	1900	1945
Removal of final barrier in respect of unemployment and related benefits, etc.	1915(1961)	1906	1934	1919	1945
The lowering of the voting age to 21	1961	1944	1934	1946	1945
The lowering of the voting age to 18	1978	1972	1985	1979	1975
Right to vote at local elections for citizens of Nordic countries	1978	1976	1982	1979	1976
Right to vote at local elections for citizens of non-Nordic countries	1981	—	—	1983	1976

Source: Eliassen & Pedersen 1985a, p. 58

known as “the Easter crisis”. In Sweden a further step towards parliamentary government was taken in 1905, but the notion that the survival of the government should depend on the will of parliament and not that of the king was not fully accepted until 1917.

Although in theory, universal suffrage and parliamentary government affect two distinct constitutional issues – one being the power to elect the national assembly, the other being the power to appoint the government – in practice both principles became inextricably linked. They constituted vital and complementary aspects of the process of democratisation, of the movement to allow the will of the people to be the decisive factor in the government of the nation.

The constitutional conflicts at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries had much the same political overtones in all the Nordic countries. The principles of universal suffrage and parliamentary democracy were fought for by the Liberals and the Social De-

mocrats, whereas the Conservatives did their utmost to try to preserve the power and influence of the monarch.

The arguments of both sides revolved around constitutional issues. Both believed, with some justification, that their particular view was supported by the constitution. The laws framing the constitutions were not based simply on a single principle, but simultaneously reflected principles that were occasionally mutually contradictory. The proponents of an independent royal power put forward the principle of the separation of powers in support of their cause. The champions of universal suffrage and parliamentary democracy countered this with reference to the concept of the sovereignty of the people. A political trial of strength was to determine which interpretation would win. The separation of powers, the dualism between king and parliament, was forced to make way for a monistic concept of unity between government and parliament.

The Road to Democracy

The various paths to democratic change taken by the Nordic countries share both similarities and points of difference. A number of researchers have tried to define the most important differences and put forward several explanations for them. Stein Rokkan (1981) has indicated that the change from absolutism to democracy took place gradually in some cases, such as Sweden, whereas the process in other countries (e.g. Denmark) was explosive. In explanation Rokkan suggests that an important factor was that Sweden had a comparatively strong and vital representative tradition, whereas a lengthy period of absolutism frequently leads to a sudden and sometimes revolutionary extension of political rights. However, the pace of change in Sweden was not consistent; the rule of the Estates during the Age of Liberty was followed, for example, by a new period of strong royal power. In his analysis of the absolutist states, the English historian Perry Anderson draws a distinction between Western and Eastern Europe. Expressed in schematic terms, it was characteristic for absolutism in Western Europe to be founded on a comparatively free class of peasants and workers together with a network of powerful and independent towns and cities. In Eastern Europe, absolutism held sway over a peasantry, who were little more than serfs, and ruled over subjugated cities. Anderson's thesis is that Sweden found itself in a bor-

derline condition as it combined the free peasantry of the West with the East's lack of a vital urban culture. Although the Swedish nobility lacked many of the privileges that its counterparts enjoyed in many of the countries of Western Europe, it was not exposed to competition from a powerful urban middle class. Neither town nor country was to hold the upper hand on a permanent basis. The resultant stalemate was the reason Sweden swung backwards and forwards from 1680 to 1809 between absolutism and the power of the Estates.

The political conflicts of the centuries preceding the triumph of democracy were played out under the polarising influence of three main social groups: the peasantry, the nobility and the bourgeoisie. Their relative strengths varied among the Nordic countries. The foundations of Danish absolutism were laid down in 1660 with the connivance of the middle classes. The political influence of the nobility waned but in rural areas the nobility were to maintain their dominion over the peasants for many years. Norway resembled Denmark to the extent that it also had a powerful bourgeoisie. The great difference lay in the rural areas. Whereas the landed gentry were the dominant force in Denmark, there was to all extents and purposes no nobility to speak of in Norway. The most powerful political force at work in the Norwegian countryside were the land-owning peasants ("the free farmers") and smallholders. In terms of its agrarian structure, Norway resembled Sweden/Finland more closely than it did Denmark.

From a comparative historical perspective, the Nordic countries seem to constitute an exception. Their development is not consistent with any standard historical-sociological schema, such as bourgeois revolution (England), revolution by conservatives from above followed by fascism (Germany and Japan), or peasant revolt followed by communism (Russia and China). The course of modernisation in the Nordic countries was comparatively peaceful. The significance of the relatively powerful position of the free farmers cannot be emphasised enough. Family-based agriculture became the basic unit of production. Even during the polarisation of the classes between capital and labour brought about by industrialisation, the farmers remained an independent power. The conflicts between conservative, liberal and agrarian interests hindered the development of a unified bourgeoisie. The relatively weak and divided middle class is an important factor in explaining the strong position of the labour movement in the politics of the Nordic countries during the twentieth century.

Table 1.2 The Nordic Countries: Basic Data 1991

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden	The Faroes	Greenland	Åland
Area, square kilometers	43 093	338 145	103 000	323 878	449 964	1 399	2 175 600	1 552
Population, thousands	5 162	5 029	260	4 274	8 644	47	55	25
Population density	120	15	2	13	19	34	0	16
Metropolitan population, %	26	17	57	17	17	31	23	42
Employment, %								
Agriculture, fishing	6	11	13	6	5	19	15	13
Manufacturing, construction	26	32	39	25	29	33	31	16
Services, transport	68	57	48	69	64	45	51	70
GDP per capita, USD	25 278	24 770	25 109	24 866	27 509
Government expenditure, % of GDP	57	57	33	54	61

Denmark: not incl. The Faroes or Greenland. Finland: incl. Åland.

Source: Yearbook of Nordic Statistics 1993

But the road to democracy in the Nordic countries cannot simply be understood with reference to the conditions obtaining within the various countries. For three of the five Nordic countries, the process of democratisation of the political institutions coincided with the struggle for national self-determination. The history of Norway is the history of the struggle of the Norwegians to free themselves first from Danish and then from Swedish rule. Finland found itself first under Swedish and then Russian dominion. Iceland was long a neglected colony of the Danish crown. The *Althing* was reconstituted in 1843 but only as an advisory body. It was not until the middle of the eighteen seventies that a limited form of self-government was introduced, which was extended further in 1904. In 1918 Iceland was recognised as a free and independent state, but the country continued to form part of a union with Denmark. There were still significant limitations on its rights to self-determination. The Danish monarch remained head of state and foreign policy was still decided in Copenhagen. It was not until the final stages of the Second

World War that the struggle of the Icelanders for independence was rewarded with victory. The Republic of Iceland was proclaimed on 17 June 1944 at Tingvalla, where just over a thousand years before the first *Althing* had gathered.

2

A Nordic Model?

Constitutional Framework

Since the advent of democracy the constitutions of the Nordic countries have gone through changes great and small. Two constitutions have been rewritten, in Denmark in 1953 and in Sweden in 1974 (table 2.1). This makes the Norwegian constitution of 1814 the oldest among them; new clauses have since been added, but they keep to the antiquated, Danish-influenced language of the original statutes. All the Nordic

Table 2.1 The Constitutions of the Nordic Countries

	<i>Name of Constitution or Basic Law</i>	<i>Introduced in year</i>	<i>Other Laws with constitutional status</i>
Norway	Grunnloven	1814	
Finland	Hallitusmuoto/ Regeringsformen	1919	Parliament Act (1928) Law on Ministerial Responsibility (1922) Impeachment Act (1922)
Iceland	Stjórnarskrá	1944	
Denmark	Grundloven	1953	Act of Succession (1953)
Sweden	Regeringsformen	1974	Freedom of the Press Act (1949) Freedom of Speech Act (1991) Act of Succession (1810)

countries have a written constitution in the form of fundamental laws that lay down basic rules for the government of the nation.

A comparative reading of the five Nordic constitutions shows that the written constitution exists in a complex relationship with political reality. As in every state based on the rule of law, the constitution serves to define the general framework for judicial and political relations. The constitution establishes a basic norm for all other legislation and regulates the powers and competence of the highest organs of the state. But constitutional laws are meant to be read less literally than ordinary legal texts. The concept of the constitution is an ambiguous one. It may refer to one or more written documents that frame the fundamental laws, as well as describe the actual system of government of a country. The practices of the living polity often depart from the letter of the laws framing the constitution.

An example of this would be the rule in both the Norwegian and Danish constitutions which states that executive power is vested in the king. As shown in the previous chapter, the constitutional conflicts attendant on the advent of parliamentary democracy meant that the concept of the king shifted from referring to the person of the monarch and came to mean the Government as accountable to Parliament. The system of government had been altered and the meaning of the constitution changed. With the Instrument of Government of 1974 Sweden took this step to its logical conclusion, its purpose being to make the wording of the constitution agree with the actual system of government. The present constitution therefore states that "the Government rules the country", whereas that of 1809 stipulated that "the King alone is empowered to rule the country".

Heads of State

In terms of their state systems a dividing-line separates Denmark, Norway and Sweden on the one hand, from Finland and Iceland on the other. The former group are monarchies and the latter republics. Does it make any difference whether the head of state of a country is a president, or a king or queen? (Female succession to the throne was introduced in Denmark in 1953, and in Sweden in 1980). Both formally and in real terms it is the Swedish monarch who has the least influence. Although the constitution requires that the monarch be kept continually informed

about the state of political affairs, he has no authority to intervene in the government of the country. In theory, the constitutions of Denmark and Norway provide their sovereigns with a prominent role. But participation in the practical work of the Government is limited to the monarch presiding at the meetings of the Council of State and, with his signature, signing major government decisions into law. The most important political responsibility of the Danish and Norwegian heads of state is the role they play in the formation of governments. A comparison with Iceland shows how marginal the practical difference between a constitutional monarchy and a republic can be. According to the formal terms of the constitution, the Icelandic president has a wealth of opportunities to play a political role but apart from the responsibility to preside over the formation of governments, the duties of the office are purely representative. The situation in Finland on the other hand is very different. The president of Finland has been given very considerable powers although his office is not so all-powerful that it would allow us to talk about presidential government. The tension between presidential and parliamentary powers is one of the distinguishing features of Finnish government.

The Executive

In historical terms, executive power in the constitutional monarchies passed from the person of the sovereign to the Government. The Cabinet and its ministers has therefore become the nucleus for the execution of state power. However, during periods of governmental crisis the political initiative may of course shift to parliament, and in a constitutional set-up like that operating in Finland the office of the president constitutes a competing centre of power. Nevertheless the dominant role of the Government is still a defining feature of the modern state. It may therefore at first seem all the more surprising that the written constitutions devote so little attention to the role of the Government. For the most part the Nordic constitutions contain rules for the appointment of the Prime Minister and other members of the Government, and how they may be called to account, both politically and before the law. How governments actually function is left largely open; the rules are limited to defining, for example, how many ministers need to be present for the Government to form a quorum. There is no explicit statement about the precise nature of the Government's duties. The Government's authority

is rather viewed as a residual. The constitutions do assert that, for example, justice shall be dispensed by independent courts of law and that the representative body of the people has control over legislation and the finances of the state – all of which serves to restrict the Government's freedom of action. The Government is, moreover, considered to constitute the supreme authority of the state.

Parliament

In terms of their general principles, the Nordic parliaments resemble one another. Nordic members of parliament are chosen by universal, direct, equal, secret and proportional elections. The constitutions of all five countries contain general provisions about the right to vote, about the eligibility of candidates, the electoral system, and the duration of the term of office. More detailed rules for electoral procedures are laid down in a specific electoral law. Proportional representation began to be adopted in the Nordic countries at the very beginning of the century. The system of majority voting in single-member constituencies was abandoned by Finland in 1906, by Sweden in 1909, by Norway in 1919, and by Denmark in 1920. The particular variant of proportional representation currently in use in Norway, Denmark and Sweden, the modified Sainte-Laguë system, was introduced at the beginning of the nineteen fifties. Iceland used majority voting in most of its constituencies to begin with, but there too elections have been by proportional voting since 1959. The trend would therefore seem to be towards convergence; the similarities of the electoral systems of the Nordic countries outnumber the differences. But in terms of how they actually operate, their electoral methods reveal quite considerable differences. The possibility of voting for individual persons, i.e. the degree to which voters are free to affect which particular candidates are elected when seats are distributed on a proportional basis, varies greatly.

As to the working methods of the parliaments, there are nowadays great similarities between all the Nordic countries, particularly since Denmark and Sweden abandoned bicameral systems in 1953 and 1971 respectively. Although the Norwegian *Storting* is made up of two sections, in comparison with the other countries this difference is of minor importance. The constitutions contain more detailed regulations gov-

erning legislation and the powers of parliament over the revenues of the state and its expenditure.

Administration and the Judiciary

All the Nordic constitutions contain specific provisions relating to administration and they do so from a desire to provide the administration of the state with consistency and stability as well as to safeguard the rule of law. Clauses of this kind are essentially very general; they govern, for example, appointments to the more important official posts and the division of the country into regional administrative units.

As mentioned previously the principle of the separation of powers has nowadays been replaced by a monistic view of the state. Instead of emphasising the distinction and the balance of power between the executive and legislative authorities, parliamentary democracy stresses the ties between parliament and government. In one regard, however, the principle of the separation of powers does live on. The danger of a politicisation of the administration of justice has led to the introduction of special constitutional provisions to safeguard the independence of the courts. As in every state governed by the rule of the law all the Nordic constitutions prevent the Government from intervening in the administration of justice by the courts.

Rights and Freedoms

All the Nordic constitutions contain to a greater or lesser degree far-reaching provisions intended to safeguard the rights and freedoms of the individual. Inspired by the American Declaration of Independence and the French Revolution, articles on rights and freedoms were incorporated in several European constitutions in the course of the nineteenth century, including the Norwegian constitution of 1814. It is worth noting that the idea that the individual possesses certain rights and freedoms in relation to the power of the state has ancient roots in Norway. The medieval Coronation Charter incorporated this very principle of legal safeguards for the individual against the arbitrary exercise of power by the state. The Swedish constitution of 1809 contained a clause which was directly derived from these ancient statutes.

The precise nature of the individual rights and freedoms enumerated

varies to some degree among the Nordic constitutions. The Norwegian provisions are relatively brief, whereas in Sweden as a result of the constitutional revisions of the nineteen seventies the list goes into great detail. The rights added in more recent times include the right to work. In this field the process of constitutional change in the Nordic countries has developed in line with changes in other countries, moving from a rather narrow to a more wide-ranging concept of individual rights. Under the influence of liberalism, the nineteenth-century view was that the rights of the individual were a form of protection from the state; and the aim of statutes from this period was to create an inviolable sphere in which the individual reigned supreme. The twentieth century has witnessed the development of a new perspective on this matter. Individuals are also endowed with certain social rights which they are entitled to assert with the support of the state. The constitutional debate has highlighted the degree to which these differing viewpoints frequently coincide with party political dividing lines. It is the parties of the Left that have been most concerned to enshrine social rights in the constitution.

Constitutions and Political Reality

As this brief survey has shown, the Nordic constitutions contain certain fundamental rules governing the political process. But if attention is only paid to the text of the articles of the written constitutions, any such picture of the structure of political life will be distorted and incomplete. Political parties are only mentioned in passing, if at all. Hardly any reference is made to the organised interest groups. The process of moulding public opinion, the mass media, and political propaganda are, with the exception of laws governing freedom of speech and of the press, not mentioned in the fundamental laws of the constitutions. A study of the written constitutions is essential but insufficient in order to understand the workings of the political institutions.

The Nordic Countries: Five Nation States?

From the perspective of international law, the fact that the countries of the Nordic area consist of five nation states is beyond dispute. However, in terms of actual political reality it would be more correct to talk of

eight separate political systems. The three autonomous areas of Åland, the Faroes, and Greenland have now gained so great a degree of self-government that they have developed political institutions of their own.

Åland

The special status of Åland within Finland is a consequence of the historical ties existing between this archipelago and Sweden, in terms of language, culture and economics. Towards the end of the First World War the inhabitants of Åland demanded the right to be part of Sweden. The League of Nations, however, decided in 1921 that Åland should be subject to Finland, but simultaneously awarded the archipelago a considerable measure of autonomy. As early as 1856 Åland had gained special constitutional status when the province was demilitarised. The inhabitants are not obliged to do military service and only citizens with the right of abode (for which one has to have been born in Åland or continuously resident for at least five years) have the right to acquire land in the archipelago. Swedish is the sole official language.

The basis for the form of government in Åland is laid down in what is known as the Act of Self-Government. Its main principle is that the inhabitants themselves should have the right to manage their own internal affairs, as long as "the internal and external security" of the country is not jeopardised.

In principle Åland functions as an independent state with its own parliament and administrative system for areas such as the police, health care, education, culture, industrial policy and transport. Åland is also entitled to elect one member to the Finnish parliament. Åland's supreme decision-making body is the *Lagting* (previously called the *Landsting*), which has thirty members who are elected by direct, proportional elections every four years. Only inhabitants with the right of abode may vote. Laws relating to the province are made by the *Lagting* and only in cases where the *Lagting* oversteps its sphere of authority does the president of the Republic have the right of veto. Before the president makes use of his veto the matter must be put to the Supreme Court, whose decisions have in practice proved definitive. One example is the Åland law on "free-communes" (see chapter 6) which was rejected by both the Supreme Court and the President in 1990.

In 1991 a new law on self-government was adopted. This extends self-

government in several areas while reducing the supervisory role of the state at the same time. The province of Åland has taken over responsibility for legislation governing areas such as social services, the mail, radio and television.

Åland's "Cabinet" is run by the province's Executive Council (*Landskapsstyrelse*) whose members are appointed by the *Lagting*. Although the *Lagting* has a relatively free hand in deciding on various forms of expenditure, its economic independence was previously greatly restricted since the province's revenues were tied to the Finnish national budget. The intention was that the inhabitants of Åland should enjoy the same advantages – neither better nor worse – than the other citizens of Finland. A new financial system has meant increased economic independence for Åland.

The Faroes

During the long period of Danish supremacy over the Faroe Islands, an independence movement developed which culminated in a unilateral declaration of independence in 1946. Denmark, however, declared the declaration invalid and a compromise was reached in 1948. In the Home Rule Bill (*Hjemmestyreloven*) of that year the Faroes were given a significant degree of autonomy. The Faroes have the right to legislate on such matters as planning, taxes, finances, culture, transport, agriculture, fishing and trade. On the other hand, the administration of justice, just as in Åland, is subordinated to the laws governing the country as a whole. The supreme decision-making body on the Faroes is the *Lagting* which consists of 32 members who are directly elected by proportional representation every four years. In addition the Faroes send two members to the Danish parliament, the *Folketing*. The executive body, the *Landsstyre*, is headed by the *Lagman* and appointed by the *Lagting*. The *Landsstyre* is responsible for the administration of the Faroes.

Greenland

Self-government in Greenland follows much the same principles as those in operation on the Faroes. From the beginning of the sixteenth century Greenland had been a colony of Denmark, but as a consequence of the

constitutional revisions of 1953 became part of Denmark, with the same rights as the rest of the country. It is entitled to send two members to the *Folketing*. However, Greenland was not given the right of self-determination. Although laws governing the affairs of Greenland were referred to an advisory council, they were proposed by the Danish Government's Minister for Greenland and decided on by the the *Folketing*.

The demands of the inhabitants of Greenland for greater autonomy resulted in a Home Rule Bill being passed by the *Folketing* in 1978 and confirmed by a referendum in Greenland in 1979. The same year saw the election of the first *Landsting*, which to date has 27 members. Elections are held every four years. As in the Faroes, the executive body is called the *Landsstyre*. Self-government has meant that the *Landsting* is free to bring various areas of administration under local control, at a pace it decides for itself. The first issues to be made subject to legislation in Greenland were education, leisure, libraries, social policy and religious matters. These were followed by trade and industry, health care and transport. Self-government does not extend to defence and foreign policy, which is a matter for the Danish nation as a whole, to which Greenland (and the Faroes) formally belong. Greenland is divided into eighteen local authorities, in some of which a number of local authority matters have been delegated to elected bodies known as *byggeråd* which may consist of between three and five individuals. As part of Denmark, Greenland and the Faroes belong to NATO (the inhabitants of Greenland and the Faroes, however, are not obliged to do military service). The Faroes elected to remain outside the European Community and, following a referendum in 1982, the Greenland *Landsting* also decided to leave the European Community.

Åland, the Faroes, and Greenland are represented in the Nordic Council. They each have two seats in council and have been given the opportunity to participate in the meetings of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

“The Nordic Model”

Political relations in the Nordic countries have come to be referred to collectively under the rubric of “the Nordic Model”; this label has been much used by foreign observers in particular. In the first decades after

the Second World War, the Nordic countries were frequently described in glowing terms, such as the “Harmonious Welfare State”. Using concepts such as “the middle way”, “the politics of compromise”, “la démocratie efficace”, “service democracy” and “the consensual democracies”, the emphasis was placed on how peacefully different social groups co-operated and on how a process of mutual compromise had helped develop a welfare state that provided the inhabitants of the Nordic countries with some of the highest standards of living to be found anywhere in the world. An early example of this genre is Marquis Child’s book, *Sweden: The Middle Way*, which was published in 1936.

There was also a contrasting picture which could be summarised under the heading of “The New Totalitarian State”. Although they had different points of view, writers such as Roland Huntford, Hans-Magnus Enzensberger, and Mogens Berendt saw the Nordic societies, and Swedish society in particular, as dominated by an omnipotent state, in which individual initiative was crushed by a suffocating bureaucracy. The authorities and organised interests had coalesced into a technocratic oligarchy which entangled its compliant citizens in a net of laws and regulations, the mesh of which was being drawn tighter and tighter.

These pictures may seem very disparate, one painted in pastel colours, the other in darkest black. But in their essential respects, they are both based on the same reality. The public sector plays a comparatively major role in both the economic and the political spheres.

The Norwegian political scientist Stein Kuhnle (1991) has attempted to isolate the distinguishing features of the Scandinavian welfare states under the following points:

- The Scandinavian welfare systems have a greater element of *state* involvement than in other countries.
- The Scandinavian countries have, in relative terms, the largest proportion of the labour force employed in the *social and educational sectors*.
- The Scandinavian countries have the highest proportion of *public-sector* employees in the social and educational sectors.
- The Scandinavian welfare systems are more *uniform* in their organisational structures.
- For historical reasons, the role of the state is seen as more *legitimate* than in other European countries.
- Scandinavian welfare systems are *comprehensive*, that is, they cover

the whole population, or whole groups of citizens (child benefit or retirement pensions, for example.)

- Social *rights* are based on *citizenship*, and are not simply (as is the case in many continental European countries) dependent on participation in the labour market.
- The Scandinavian welfare systems are *not class-based*, those with high incomes have been integrated into the system as well.
- The Scandinavian welfare systems are comparatively *generous and redistributive*.
- In comparison with other countries, the welfare systems contain a greater element of the provision of *services* and are less involved in making cash transfers.
- *Full employment* has been the over-riding goal.

Other writers who have attempted to isolate the defining characteristics of the Nordic countries have emphasised the role of the “popular movements”, the importance of the idea of progress, the drive for efficiency, the pragmatic ethos of decision-making, and the culture of consensus (see Heckscher 1984, for example).

There are thus a whole range of phenomena that have come to be seen as distinctive features of the Nordic countries. There is no single and unambiguous definition of “the Nordic model”. Without simplifying matters too much, it would be correct to see discussion of the implications of the Nordic model as revolving around two main areas of significance. The first of these involves *a specific type of public policy*. The general principles of the welfare system differ in significant respects from those of many other countries. The other main sense in which “the Nordic model” is used relates to *a specific type of polity*. To some extent at least, the Nordic countries have been able to develop their own particular ways of solving conflicts and making political decisions. These two main areas of concern will be discussed in more detail at this point. Subsequently we will go on to discuss to what degree differences exist *between* the Nordic countries. Finally we will consider to what extent current changes in society are likely to involve a weakening of the distinguishing features of the Nordic model.

I. Policy

Firstly, the welfare policies of the Nordic countries are comparatively *comprehensive*. Political influence has extended to cover a wide range of public life with a great number of social areas being made subject to political decisions. Secondly, welfare policy has come to be seen as *institutional*, by which is meant that every citizen has the right to enjoy a broad spectrum of social benefits. The opposite of this would be a residual policy which is one targeted more towards specific groups on the basis of means-testing. Furthermore, the aim of welfare policy has been to create *solidarity* and *universality*. The aim of all social policy has been to integrate the whole population and to compensate for any inequality of provision.

II. Polity

The Nordic Model can be seen as an attempt to unite capitalism, parliamentary democracy and the welfare state. The basis of political power in the model is a historic compromise between the main classes of industrial society, labour and capital. Society is characterised by the existence of a powerful state and powerful organised interest groups. The role of interest organisations is of particular significance in the labour market. This collaboration between the state and centralised organisations has been described as *corporatism*. In political terms it is *Social Democracy* that has been chiefly characteristic of the Nordic model as it has dominated the executive power over long periods. The aim of political decision-making has been to avoid divisive conflicts; an emphasis on compromise and pragmatic solutions has led to the development of a political culture based on consensus.

Interconnections

For analytical purposes we can therefore distinguish two different aspects of the Nordic model – policy and polity. In practice, policy and polity are linked together. The labour movement has been able to exploit its power base on two fronts (powerful trades union organisations and long-term domination of the executive) to implement its welfare policy goals. In turn, an expanded public sector has provided the move-

ment's organisations with greater influence and economic benefits. Policy and polity have determined one another.

National Variations

This definition of the Nordic model involves a great deal of generalisation. As a description of each of the five Nordic countries it suits some better than others (table 2.2). There is no doubt that the country which shows the greatest similarities with the Nordic model is Sweden. Sweden has the largest public sector. The Swedish trades unions have the largest membership and the greatest political influence. The Social Democratic domination of political life has been most apparent in Sweden.

The country whose social systems diverge most from the Nordic model is Iceland. The relative size of its public sector lies approximately along the median for Western developed countries but below that of the other Nordic states.

Finland has followed the same pattern of development as Sweden, but has always lagged some way behind. The Swedish experience has had considerable influence in Finland.

Denmark departs in several respects from the centralised, standard solutions of the Nordic model. Private pension schemes play a greater role. Housing policy has created greater scope for market solutions. Personal social services are frequently provided on a more individual basis than is the case in Sweden, for example. Interventionist policies in relation to the labour market have not had the same impact.

Developmental Characteristics

The main aim of the welfare system of the Nordic model has been to raise and redistribute the living standards of the whole population in the course of a relatively short historical period. Welfare policies have been largely successful. Various indicators of the living conditions of Nordic citizens show that material standards have risen markedly in the course of a few decades.

The issue on which much attention is focused today is whether the Nordic model has been a historical parenthesis. What are the preconditions for the organised solidarity that has been the foundation of the Nordic welfare state?

The Swedish Study of Power and Democracy found that society is developing to all intents and purposes away from those features that specifically define the Swedish, and similarly the Nordic, model.

The process of *internationalisation* is altering the power structures of the nation state as well as those specifically national political solutions which differ significantly from those of other countries.

Changes in methods of production mean that the number of people forming part of the agricultural and industrial social groupings is declining. The Nordic model is closely connected to industrial society. Post-industrialism is weakening the social basis of the Nordic model.

New kinds of political questions, such as environmental issues and women's issues, have found it difficult to find a home within the framework of the established political institutions.

The *public sector* has reached a size which makes it impossible for there to be any further expansion. The era of major social reforms is over.

The *established organisations* and the political parties are under threat both from within and without. The problems involved in keeping encompassing, centralised organisations united are increasing. The authority of the established institutions is being weakened.

The *mass media* have entered the arena to form a new power centre which has ramifications, in turn, for the ways in which other power centres operate. The pragmatic negotiating climate of the compromise culture has been made more difficult.

Decentralisation to local and regional bodies and to an increasing number of independent power centres is challenging the role played by the institutions of the nation state.

The process of *individualisation* is resulting in the demands made by the public becoming more and more differentiated, and more difficult to meet within a framework of standardised solutions.

Inflexibility in many of the institutions of the welfare state is preventing the development of the adaptability and flexibility required by the changes on the international scene.

The Nordic model has been subject to particularly intense pressure as a result of *the economic crisis*. As early as in the 1980s Denmark was forced to implement significant cuts in its public sector expenditure. Norway faces an increasing deficit in government finances despite the revenue from oil and gas it has received. The loss of Soviet trade had an immediate impact on Finland's economy; the results were high unem-

Table 2.2 The Nordic Countries: A Comparative Survey

	<i>Variations within the Nordic countries</i>	<i>Other Western democracies in comparison with the Nordic countries</i>
Type of Democracy	Representative democracy. Referenda commonest in Denmark.	Representative democracy. Referenda more usual in Switzerland, for example.
Electoral Systems	Proportional representation Scope to elect individual candidates least in Sweden.	First past the post system more usual. Not same degree of pro- portionality in P.R. systems.
Party Systems	Multi-party system. Largest number of parties in Denmark and Finland.	Party systems under majority voting generally less fragmented.
Cleavages	Primarily socio-economic. One dimension but relatively differentiated.	Greater number of cleavages e.g. religion, language, regions.
Political Dominance	Social Democracy strongest in Sweden and Norway, weaker in Finland and Iceland.	Social Democracy weaker.
Governments	Minority coalition governments have become more usual, particularly in Denmark. Finland has had broadly-based majority coalition governments.	Great variation both in terms of parliamentary base and stability.
Basis of Executive Power	Parliamentary democracy. Finland: combination of parliamentary democracy and presidential power.	Parliamentary democracy the rule in Europe. Presidential power in the USA. Mixed type in France.
Local Government	Local authorities very significant. Finland has no elected county councils.	Weaker tradition of local authorities than N.Europe. At regional level, relatively more important in federal states, for example.
Power Structure	Large private companies, state and centralised economic organisations.	Private companies, often with smaller public sector, weaker organised interest groups. In contrast, often stronger civil society, e.g. church, private schools, urban culture.
Welfare Model	Covers whole population. Large public sector. Comprehensive and redistributive. Sweden most typical. Iceland: relatively small public sector	Social benefits often more residual and means-tested. Social benefits more dependent on position in the labour market than on citizenship.
Individual Rights	Emphasis on social rights Rights often linked with collective organisations.	More orientation to rights of individual. Judicial process more important. Constitutional courts more usual.

ployment and a sizeable budget deficit. Within the space of a few years at the beginning of the 1990s, Sweden has been transformed from a country of full employment to one with wide-scale unemployment and a rapidly increasing public sector deficit. Iceland, too, which for many years has enjoyed full employment is now facing the problem of unemployment on an increasing scale. The decline of the fishing industry meant that in 1992 and 1993 the Faroes went through an acute economic crisis; the national income fell by 40 per cent.

As further increases in taxation are currently impossible, the unemployment problem can no longer be solved by increasing the number of public sector employees. In all the Nordic countries it has proved difficult to adapt the system of social welfare and the political institutions to what is in many respects a new situation.

At present no one can say to what extent the Nordic model will disappear, nor what kind of transformations it will go through. The purpose of this book is to shed light on the developments taking place in the Nordic polity.

3

Elections and Political Parties

As in many other countries, the political institutions of the Nordic states went through dramatic changes at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. It was then that the three features that were subsequently to distinguish their forms of government came to prominence: universal suffrage, parliamentary democracy and political parties. These three phenomena are strongly inter-related. The massive extension of the franchise meant that the older kind of party formation, small caucuses of parliamentarians, became antiquated. The need to mobilise and gain the support of a new and vast electorate necessitated the development of country-wide mass organisations. The introduction of proportional representation facilitated the formation of new parties. Polarisation into political parties reduced the number of independent members and resulted in clearer and more permanent lines of demarcation among the electorate and in parliament. The parliamentary system became a means for enabling shifts of power to occur on a party political basis.

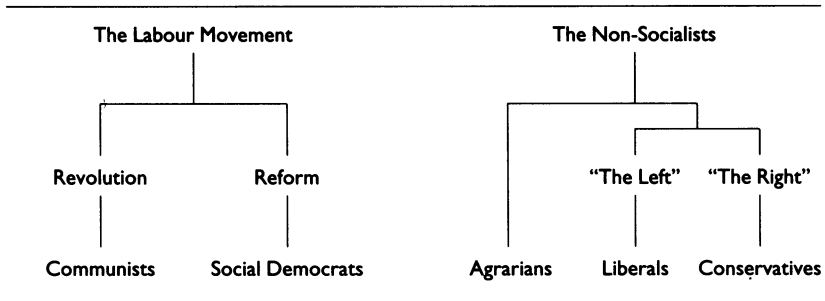
Political Parties

Why did these changes in the political structure occur at that particular point? It is clear that behind the political changes lay the economic and social transformations then affecting all the Nordic societies. The technological and industrial revolution changed the conditions of life and commerce both in the countryside and in the towns. While the old antag-

onisms between town and country were still in force, conflicts of interest between the social classes were intensifying. For a long period the vast new social groups of wage-earners were to remain without political rights. As a result the struggle for universal suffrage was fought in parallel with campaigns to extend political and trades union organisation. As in other European states, it was the rise of the labour movement that was to have a decisive effect on the formation of new parties, both because the Labour parties represented a modern kind of organisation based on mass membership with a widely distributed network of local branches and because political conflicts came to be very much determined by the antagonism between the labour movement and its conservative opponents. These are the historical roots that continue to nourish today's conflicts between the political Left and Right. Although this left-right dimension, which was derived from socio-economic conflict, is the principal dividing line in the party political systems of the Nordic countries, it does not suffice to explain the state of the party systems as we know them today. Nor does it explain why, despite the Nordic countries having so many common characteristics, they display national peculiarities. Other factors that were significant in the formation of the party system include the interests of rural communities, language, religion, culture and international relations. According to the theory advanced by Stein Rokkan, the development of a system of political parties can be traced back to a number of economic, social, geographic and cultural cleavages which determine the particular configuration of parties in each country. However, the formation of parties does not take place as a continuous process; rather, parties come into being at specific historical moments and in crisis situations. Once the crisis has been solved, once the immediate cause of the crisis disappears, this does not mean that the party dies out. On the contrary – and this is a point of prime importance for Rokkan – the party system is frozen, becomes crystallised, and keeps the same appearance despite younger generations of voters replacing older ones. The current party systems of the Nordic countries would therefore be identical with those of the nineteen twenties.

A Five-Party System?

Rokkan has managed to capture one of the most prominent features of the party politics of the Nordic states. Mention is often made of a system

Diagram 3.1 The Nordic Five-Party System

of five parties as typical for the Nordic countries (diagram 3.1). On the left we see a Social Democratic party and a Communist party, while on the right there is a bloc of “bourgeois” parties consisting of a Farmer’s party, a Liberal party and a Conservative party. It is clear that these main political orientations account for a major part of political life in the Nordic countries. But this conclusion is only valid as a very general and schematic view. Much has happened since the twenties and the differences between individual countries are quite significant in several respects; not least with regard to Iceland, where the party system diverges considerably from the Nordic pattern (see table 3.1).

In Finland it was not primarily economic but linguistic divisions that determined the first party formations. During the period of Swedish rule, the increasingly large apparatus of public administration came to be dominated by Swedish-speaking public officials. The endeavours of the Finnish Party to improve the status of the Finnish language were simultaneously a struggle for the social and cultural interests of the majority of the population against the established upper-class. But these efforts to strengthen Finnish national identity were aimed not solely against Swedish, but also Russian influence. The Finnish Party was to become divided, however, on the question of the resistance tactics to be used against Czarist Russia. The older, conservative patriarchy in the party leadership inclined towards compliance whereas their more liberally oriented young opponents believed passive resistance to be the most effective tactic. Their differences of opinion led to the party splitting at the beginning of the eighteen nineties into what were known as the parties of the Old Finns and the Young Finns.

Table 3.1 The Political Parties

	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Finland</i>	<i>Iceland</i>	<i>Norway</i>	<i>Sweden</i>
Communists and left socialists	Socialist People's Party 1959 Left Socialist Party 1967	Left Wing Alliance 1944	People's Alliance 1956	Socialist Left Party 1975 (1961)	Left Party 1917
Social democrats	Social Democrats 1871	Social Democrats 1899	Social Democrats 1916	Labour Party 1887	Social Democrats 1889
Centrist and agrarian parties	Liberals 1870	Centre Party 1906	Progressive Party 1916	Centre Party 1920	Centre Party 1910
Liberal parties	Social Liberals 1905	Swedish People's Party 1906 Liberal Party 1894	—	Liberals 1883	Liberals 1934
Christian parties	Christian People's Party 1970	Christian League 1958	—	Christian Democratic Party 1933	Christian Democrats 1964
Other centrist parties	Centre Democrats 1973	—	—	—	—
Conservative parties	Conservatives 1916	Coalition Party 1918	Independence Party 1929	Conservatives 1884	Conservatives 1904
Protest parties	Progress Party 1972	Rural Party 1959	—	Progress Party 1973	New Democracy 1991
Environmental parties and women parties	Green Party 1983	Green League 1988	Women's Alliance 1986	The Greens 1988	Ecological Party 1981

Year of party formation

The Parties of the Bourgeoisie

Language conflicts in Finland have now abated, but the parties formed when the conflict was at its most acute continue to exist on the non-Socialist side of the Finnish parliament. The Swedish Party was reorganised in 1906. The newly-formed Swedish People's Party represented their attempt to free themselves from the image of being a minor upper-class party and instead become a party for the whole of the Swedish-speaking population, which also contained many farmers and workers in western and southern Finland. The National Coalition Party arose

from the ashes of the Old Finns, and has served as Finland's Conservative party to the present day. The Young Finns renamed themselves first the National Progress Party and then the Finnish People's Party until they became the Liberal Party in 1965.

Antagonism between Liberals and Conservatives dominated domestic politics throughout the Nordic countries at the end of the nineteenth century. The then current label for the Liberals, the Party of the Left, has been retained as their party name in both Denmark and Norway. What Liberals had in common was opposition to the ancient privileges of the Estates, and demands for freedom of trade, individual rights and freedoms, and universal suffrage. These aspects of their party programs, together with their demands for socio-political reforms, served to unite them at times with the growing labour movement. But the latter's goal of comprehensive changes to the economic and social organisation of society gradually brought co-operation to an end.

In Sweden the party groupings of the early nineteen twenties have been retained largely unchanged. The origins of the modern Conservatives (the Moderate Coalition Party) are to be found in conservative and moderate groups at the turn of the century. And while it is true that the Swedish Liberals split from 1923 to 1934 into two parties, because of differences of opinion on the Prohibition issue, the reunited party is the same Liberal Party in existence today.

The Liberal Party in Denmark had split in 1905 when a faction made up of smallholders and elements of the Copenhagen intelligentsia left the party, in protest at defence expenditure, to form the Social Liberals. The remaining Liberals came to be dominated by medium-sized farmers who have formed the backbone of the party ever since. The Danish Conservatives changed their name in 1915 from the Party of the Right, to the Conservative People's Party.

Norwegian Conservatives have continued to call themselves the Party of the Right since the foundation of the party in 1884. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Norwegian Liberals were a dominant power in Norwegian political life and their high profile was due particularly to their linguistic and cultural engagement. The party was closely connected with the temperance movement, the non-conformist religious groups and the New Norwegian language movement. The Liberals have, however, lost ground to younger parties which have made successive inroads on the party's established core of support among farmers, the layman movement, and the liberal, urban middle class. The role of the Liberals

as a party of counter-culture has nowadays been taken over by the Christian People's Party.

Iceland's Independence Party is a broadly-based middle class party, formed in 1929 by the unification of conservative and liberal parties. Ever since the foundation of the republic the Independence Party has remained Iceland's largest political party. It corresponds in sociological terms more to the German Christian Democrats and the British Tories than to the other Conservative parties of the Nordic countries. The party's supporters are found not only among the middle classes but to a considerable extent among agricultural and industrial workers. The performance of the Independence Party in the elections of 1987 deteriorated due to a split in the party, but recovered in 1991.

The Farmers' Parties

A common feature of the Nordic party systems is the existence of agrarian parties. This kind of party was also formed in some of the East European countries and among the Protestant cantons of Switzerland. But in the rest of Europe farming interests have usually found a vehicle in one of the larger non-Socialist parties, in one of the Conservative or Christian parties, for example. In a study of the origins and development of the party systems, Lipset and Rokkan note four factors that are common to states with agrarian parties. Firstly, towns and industrial centres were relatively weak at the time when universal suffrage was introduced. Secondly, a large part of the farming population was made up of independent farming families. A third explanatory factor is found in the existence of major cultural divisions between town and country, which worked against the integration of the agrarian economy within the capitalist markets of the towns and cities. A fourth similarity is the weakness of the Catholic Church.

Mention has already been made of the formation of parties in Denmark and the way in which the Liberals (*Venstre*) became closely identified with the interests of farmers, once the Social Liberals (*Radikale Venstre*) left to form their own party. The Norwegian Farmer's Party, renamed the Centre Party in 1959, was formed in 1920 as a break-away faction from the Liberals. The Swedish Farmers' League had been founded a few years earlier and this party too changed its name in the fifties to become the Centre Party. The corresponding party in Finland

nowadays uses this same name; the party was founded in 1906 under the name of the Agrarian Party. Iceland also has a farmers' party, the Progressive Party, founded in 1916.

Christian Parties

One example of changes to the party system since the twenties has been the growth of Christian parties. Norway's Christian Democratic Party was founded in 1933 and has been the most successful party of its kind in the Nordic countries – over the last decade the party has managed to win support from approximately one tenth of the electorate. The religious parties in Denmark and Finland are smaller but have been represented in parliament since 1973 and 1970 respectively. The Swedish Christian Democrats made their first electoral appearance in 1964 and entered parliament in 1991.

Labour Parties

The rise of the labour movement and its organisations is intimately connected with the economic and social transformations that took place in the Nordic countries during the end of the nineteenth century. Although in many respects this development occurred simultaneously, it also had features peculiar to the individual nations which explain the significant differences in terms of character and strength between the Nordic Labour parties. Denmark was the first Nordic country to be industrialised and its Social Democratic Party was founded in 1871. The transformation of the country into a modern industrial society was underpinned by an urban culture that was already fairly well-developed. In this regard, Denmark could be considered the most Continental of the Nordic countries. Conditions for the working population were altered step by step and the growth of the Danish labour movement occurred gradually, without any great rupture in social and political structures. The process of industrialisation in Sweden was much swifter and more comprehensive. And there, the conflict between the labour movement and the Establishment was more acute, but with the advent of universal suffrage and parliamentary democracy, the Swedish Social Democrats showed no reluctance in accepting the responsibilities of government.

In the other Nordic countries, the social integration of the labour

movement was a more drawn-out process. Some of the difficulties were the result of the internal conflicts which raged across labour movements throughout Europe immediately after the Russian Revolution and the end of the First World War. The split between the reformist Social Democrat and the revolutionary Communist factions took different forms in various Nordic countries. Left-wing opposition within the Social Democrats was insignificant in Denmark. Left-wing Socialists in Sweden were never in a position to threaten the dominant position of the Social Democratic Party, but gained control of the party organisation in the northern part of the country and formed for a while the largest workers' party in that area. In Norway the relative strengths of the factions were the reverse. Left-wingers were in a majority in the Norwegian Labour Party by 1918 and for several years the Labour Party was a member of Komintern, the Communist international. In 1927, however, the Norwegian Labour Party was reunited with the Social Democratic faction that had left the party. The Moscow-loyalist Communist Party founded in 1923 has never had more than the most marginal influence on Norwegian politics.

Those Nordic countries which were among the last to gain national independence and where the struggle for independence was at times both bitter and dramatic, are also those where splits in the labour movement were the deepest and most permanent. Once Finland was free, social and political antagonisms intensified and led to open civil war. The Communist Party founded in 1918 had been inspired by the Russian Revolution and campaigned for armed revolution. After the defeat of the Reds, the party worked underground and all Communist activity was prohibited during the nineteen thirties. Even though the Social Democratic Party distanced itself from the principle of armed revolution, its manifesto was long dominated by the concept of the class struggle and it was not until the end of the twenties that the idea of the Social Democrats' possible participation in government began to gain acceptance.

The Finnish Communist Party was legalised at the end of the World War Two. In an electoral alliance with other left-wing organisations, though not including the Social Democrats, the Communists formed the Democratic League of the People of Finland. This Communist-dominated coalition won almost a quarter of the votes in the first election after the war. For many years the DLPP hovered around the twenty per cent mark but has since fallen back, not least because of internal conflicts.

For two decades the Communist Party was split into two factions, the more "Euro-communist" majority and a Moscow-loyalist minority. In 1986 the break was made final. The minority were expelled and went on to form the Democratic Alternative party. In 1990 the DLPF and the Communist Party reformed themselves into the Alliance of the Left.

During the post-war years, the Social Democrats gained between 20 and 25 per cent of the vote. The relationship between the two workers' parties remained very cool until the mid-sixties. At the end of the fifties a group of left-wingers left the Social Democrats and campaigned as a separate party over several elections.

The relations between the Finnish workers' parties is reminiscent of the situation in Iceland. There the Social Democrats are even weaker. On three occasions (1930, 1937 and 1956) the Social Democrats were decimated by defections to the Communists. The latter are now part of the People's Alliance which has been the largest party of the Left during the greater part of the post-war period. The People's Alliance consists not only of communists but socialists, left-wing socialists, nationalists and environmentalists as well. The party differs from the Social Democrats, not least in its opposition to Iceland's membership of NATO.

Foreign policy has also been a significant factor in the formation of parties on the Danish and Norwegian Left. When Norway joined NATO in 1949, there was already a significant minority in the Labour Party opposed to membership. The conflict intensified once more towards the end of the fifties and the left-wing opposition was finally expelled and went on in 1961 to found the Socialist People's Party. At the beginning of the nineteen seventies they entered an electoral alliance with the Norwegian Communist Party, but once the main body of the Communists refused to continue with this collaboration, the Socialist Left Party was founded in 1975. A left-wing socialist party was also formed in Denmark, but there it was as a result of a faction breaking away from the Communist party. The Danish Socialist People's Party founded in 1959 wanted to conduct policies less loyal to Moscow than those of the Danish Communist Party. The Socialist People's Party was itself to split a few years later; one faction broke away in 1967 and founded the Left Socialist Party which was critical of the collaboration between the Socialist People's Party and the Social Democratic government.

Extreme Right-wing Parties

One manifestation of the intensity of the political conflicts in Finland at the end of the nineteen twenties was the rise of an anti-communist far-right group known as the Lappo movement. This organisation became in turn the Popular Movement for the Homeland (the IKL), a party with obvious Fascist elements. The party never succeeded in gaining significant support among the voters, but was represented in government during the initial stages of the Second World War. The Popular Movement for the Homeland was prohibited after the end of the war.

Fascist and Nazi movements during the inter-war years never gained more than the most marginal support in Sweden, Norway and Denmark. The relative weakness of the far right in Scandinavia is explained primarily by the fact that the established parliamentary system was sufficiently vital to attempt to deal actively with the great problem of that era, the economic crisis. This helped to confirm the legitimacy of the established parties and served to reduce the scope for the formation of new parties.

Protest Parties

The image of Nordic party politics as placid and stable came in for a serious shock during the Danish parliamentary elections of 1973. The five established parties received only 63 per cent of the votes and six new parties entered parliament. The biggest of the newcomers was the newly formed Progress Party, whose program was aimed primarily at reducing taxation and state bureaucracy. The Centre Democratic Party was formed that same year by dissident Social Democrats and can also be considered a protest party. This upheaval in the Danish party system took both politicians and observers by surprise. Retrospective analyses have revealed that the size of the protest vote in 1973 was linked to dissatisfaction among the voters with established politicians and their parties and that the degree of that distrust was at its height in that year. Four factors determined the Danish protest vote of 1973. Firstly, for several years previously there had been a weakening of the bonds between voters and the political parties, as well as in the trust in politicians. Secondly, the established parties were not offering real alternatives over a whole range of issues; the tax burden had also risen during the period of non-Socialist government between 1968 and 1971. Thirdly, new politi-

cal leaders were able to exploit television to get their populist message across. Fourthly, the Danish electoral system is so structured that it is relatively easy for minor parties to gain seats. At subsequent elections the established parties have been able to win back some of the support they lost at the beginning of the seventies and managed to win ca. 80 per cent of the vote towards the end of the eighties.

A similar development took place at the same time in Norway. There too a protest party was formed, "Anders Lange's Party for the Reduction of Taxes and Public Spending" (later renamed the Progress Party), which gained 5 per cent of the votes cast in 1973. In the latter half of the nineteen eighties the Progress Party made huge strides. The party entered parliament, although it only gained two seats. However, as the positions of the two main blocs of parties were very even, those two seats were of pivotal importance in determining the formation of the government. The Progress Party held the balance of power and found itself at the centre of political life. The party made great advances in the local and national elections between 1987 and 1989, but lost votes in the early nineties. The image of the party is a right of centre, protest party with liberal leanings.

A rather different kind of protest party appeared in Finland. The Finnish Rural Party was formed by a break-away faction from the Centre Party. The process of urbanisation happened later in Finland than in the other Nordic countries, but took place all the more swiftly. Between 1960 and 1970 the percentage of people employed in the agricultural sector fell from 35 to 10 per cent. The Finnish Rural Party was opposed to the rapid pace of centralisation and, thanks to support from the sparsely-populated areas threatened by depopulation, the party won 10.5 per cent of the votes in the election in 1970. Towards the end of the seventies the party seemed to be moribund, but in 1983 it once more reached the 10 per cent mark. On this occasion it was less a protest vote by smallholders that favoured the Finnish Rural Party than widespread dissatisfaction with the established parties.

The Green Parties

Since the mid-seventies environmental issues have been at the forefront of politics in Western Europe. After a downward trend at the end of the seventies and beginning of the eighties, support for environmental

causes has been on the increase throughout the eighties. Interview surveys show that for a large majority of electors the environment has now become a very important issue.

How have the established parties reacted to this major new issue which was thought to be too problematic to fit into the traditional pattern of political divisions? Theories have been put forward that the environmental issue is proof that the "frozen" five party system is in the process of thawing out and being replaced by new parties and alliances. A comprehensive revolution in Nordic politics could therefore be expected. What in fact has happened?

The environmental parties made significant advances during the nineteen eighties but these were subject to large national variations. Finland was the first Nordic country where the environmental movement won parliamentary seats. "The Greens" won two seats at the parliamentary elections in 1983. During the Icelandic elections of 1983, a new Women's Party gained 5.5 per cent of the votes which gave it three of the *Althing's* sixty seats. The party's manifesto attached great importance to environmental and peace issues in addition to its feminist political programme. Green candidates made their first appearance at local elections in Reykjavik in 1991 and gained one per cent of the vote.

The Swedish Ecology Party was formed in 1981. Its roots go back to the popular campaign against nuclear power which was founded to campaign in the referendum of 1980. Attempts to enter parliament met with no success in 1982 and 1985, but in 1988 the Greens gained 5.5 per cent of the vote which gave them 20 parliamentary seats. Three years later the Greens lost their representation in the *Riksdag*.

Things have gone less well for the environmental parties in Norway and Denmark. At their first parliamentary elections in 1989 the Norwegian Greens won 0.4 per cent of the vote. The Danish Greens were founded in 1983 but have still not reached the two per cent threshold for entry to the *Folketing*.

Why do Denmark and Norway deviate in this regard? The hypothesis that environmental issues are not as salient there can be refuted immediately. Support for "green" values is just as strong as in the other Nordic countries. Growing support for organised environmental groups testifies to the fact that environmentalist opinion is no less powerful in Norway or Denmark.

Comparative studies suggest that the differences can be traced to the party system. The major factor is the political opportunity structure.

The significance of the nuclear power issue in Swedish politics can hardly be overestimated. Existing political channels were unable to resolve the nuclear power issue and this created scope for the formation of new parties.

The environment in general and nuclear power in particular have raised the question of whether and to what degree the overwhelmingly one-dimensional party system has had another dimension added to it. According to some interpretations, the left-right dimension of industrial society has become the old politics, while the post-materialist world of the environmental dimension is that of the new politics.

Studies of electoral opinion as well as of party manifestos and positions have found it difficult to discover unambiguous evidence of the development of a separate ecological dimension. On the contrary there is a strong, and possibly strengthening, correlation between these two dimensions. In many cases the views of the Ecologists and the Left coincide. This would mean that the expression of Green values was not restricted to a new and separate dimension. Perhaps the greatest significance of this may lie in its effect on a redefinition of the left-right dimension. Is "Red" turning "Green"?

If that is the case, it would explain the poor performance of the Green parties in Norway and Denmark. The Norwegian Socialist Left Party has at present a pronounced ecological emphasis and made great advances in the 1989 elections. In Denmark, the Social Democrats have been able to gain the support of a significant section of environmentally concerned voters. The party and its supporters have been turning "green". In these two countries the environmental issue has not led to a break-up of the party system. The established parties have, on the contrary, shown themselves to be rather flexible. This has left little room for new parties.

Åland

It was a long time before a party system developed in Åland. The inhabitants of Åland, who would have preferred to be part of Sweden, regarded the new system for self-government with scepticism. Electoral participation was low and personal connections were more significant than the differences between the political parties. For a long period the members of the *Landsting* were elected from within a single electoral alliance.

However, various political tendencies gradually formed into factions within this alliance. It was not until the end of the seventies that these factions made their first appearance as independent party groups. When at last the party system in Åland was established, it bore striking similarities to the prototypical five-party system that had already been formed in the Nordic states by the nineteen twenties. The lack of a working class in the traditional sense and the dominance of primary industries meant that the Social Democrats are a comparatively small party in Åland. The largest parties in Åland are the Centre and Liberal parties. Two new parties emerged in the 1987 elections, the Greens and the Non-Partisan Coalition, which put themselves forward as an alternative to the traditional parties of Left and Right.

The Faroes

The fundamental dividing line between the parties in the Faroes concerns the issue of relations with Denmark. When the first Faroese parties were being formed in 1906, this conflict was the central issue; The Liberal Unionist Party wanted to retain the legal and administrative ties with Denmark, whereas the Social Liberal Autonomy Party wanted an extensive Faroese right to self-determination. Recently two parties have appeared that demand full independence with the right to legislate in every area: on the non-Socialist side is the Conservative People's Party and on the left, the Republican Party. The Social Democrats largely accept the present form of self-government.

Greenland

The Nationalist issue has also been a significant factor in the formation of parties in Greenland. The two parties which emerged from the elections to the *Landsting* in 1979, the Progressives and the Unionists, did accept the new form of self-government but the more Social Democratically oriented Progressives campaigned for a referendum on Greenland's membership of the European Community. At the 1983 election a new party entered the *Landsting* – the left-leaning Independence Party – which wants to break completely away from Denmark and close the American bases on the island.

Table 3.2 Electoral Systems

	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Finland</i>	<i>Iceland</i>	<i>Norway</i>	<i>Sweden</i>
Name of parliament	Folketing	Eduskunta	Althing	Storting	Riksdag
Number of seats	179	200	63	165	349
Including additional member seats	40	—	13	8	39
Minimum requirement for minor parties	2%	—	—	(4%)	4%
Local electoral alliances	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Number of constituencies	7	15	8	19	29
Method for allocation of seats	Modified Sainte-Laguë	D'Hondt	D'Hondt	Modified Sainte-Laguë	Modified Sainte-Laguë
Scope for election of individuals	Medium	Great	Medium	Little	Little
Voting age (years)	18	18	18	18	18
Term of office (years)	4	4	4	4	3

Electoral Systems

Throughout the world a large number of different electoral systems are in use, all with their own peculiarities and consequent results. What the Nordic countries have in common is that not one of them still uses the system of majority voting in single or multi-member constituencies. (One minor exception to this is the election by majority vote of the single representative to the Finnish parliament from Åland.) All the Nordic countries now use electoral systems based on the principle of proportional representation. However, this method too has a number of variations, a fact that can be readily appreciated when comparing elections to the parliaments of the Nordic countries (table 3.2).

In theory, an electoral system is a fairly straightforward matter. Every parliament has a number of seats, in the five Nordic states this number varies between 63 and 349, and these seats have to be distributed between a number of parties depending on the votes cast for each of them. The complications and variations arise because of the mathematical complexity of the various methods of allocation which are designed to

ensure that parliamentary seats are satisfactorily distributed on a regional basis, and to select precisely which candidates from a given party are to be given the seats. The seats have firstly to be distributed between the different constituencies. Secondly, the number of seats in each constituency has to be distributed between the parties. Thirdly, the seats have to be allocated to candidates within the parties so that the individual representative may be elected.

Distribution of the Seats among Constituencies

The division of a country into various constituencies is a relic from the time when every part of the country sent its representative to the *Thing*, the *herredag* or the assembly of the Estates. Despite the fact that the growth of political parties has totally changed the nature of the representative process, all the Nordic countries have retained this element of territorial representation. In Sweden seats are distributed on the basis of the number of people entitled to vote in a particular constituency; the number of seats allocated is determined prior to every allocation with reference to any population changes that may have occurred. In Finland the allocation of seats is proportionally related to the number of inhabitants in a constituency. In Danish constituencies both the size of the registered electorate and the number of inhabitants is taken into account, but there is also an additional factor: population density. The aim of this is to strengthen the representation of sparsely populated areas. As a consequence of the way the Danish electoral system works, this rule has no effect on the distribution of seats between the parties but can affect from which part of the country a party gains a particular seat. In Norway there has been some degree of re-adjustment but sparsely populated areas are still over-represented and Oslo, for example, has fewer seats than the city would be entitled to if its allocation were strictly proportional. The Norwegian electoral system was changed in 1988 and in addition to the 157 constituency seats, there are now another 8 seats elected by the country as a whole. Iceland has gone furthest in over-representing rural areas. Initially the Icelandic electoral system was deliberately designed to favour very strongly the representation of the rural areas. The effects of this distortion were diminished by a change in the law in 1959, but still exist to some extent.

Allocation of the Seats to Political Parties

In Finland and Iceland the seats in a constituency are distributed among the parties according to the method devised by the Belgian D'Hondt. At the beginning of the nineteen fifties Norway, Denmark and Sweden abandoned the D'Hondt method and introduced a method known as the modified Sainte-Laguë system. Both methods have in common that the number of votes cast for each party is divided in succession to give a quotient, the size of which determines the order of the allocation of the constituency seats to the parties. The divisor used in the D'Hondt method is a whole number and each party's vote is divided first by the number 1, then 2, then 3 and so on. The Sainte-Laguë system uses odd-number divisors and in its modified form the first divisor is 1.4, then 3, then 5, and so on. The method of the largest average, the D'Hondt rule, is the one most favourable to large parties, but in large constituencies with many seats both methods tend to give the same result. In small constituencies on the other hand, it is not unusual for the results to be different. Small parties are therefore at a particular disadvantage because of the method used in Iceland and Finland. Minor parties can also lose out under the modified Sainte-Laguë system. In those constituencies where a party does not gain any seats, its votes are wasted in effect. In order to compensate for this disproportionality Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, and now Norway as well have adopted "additional member" systems. Only some of these additional seats are used within the constituencies, the remaining additional seats are distributed among the parties so that the final allocation of parliamentary seats corresponds as closely as possible with the proportion of votes cast for each party throughout the country. The smaller parties are the major beneficiaries of the additional seats. If the "additional member" system had not been implemented, neither the Left Socialists nor the Christian People's Party would have gained any seats at the Danish parliamentary election of 1981, and in 1991 the Left Party in Sweden would have gained only 5 seats instead of 16.

But no country has an electoral system that results in exact proportionality. The task of any parliament is not only to represent various political opinions as accurately as possible, but also to provide a basis for the Government. Fragmentation into too many parties would make the formation of a government more difficult. This is why countries using additional member systems adopt some form of exclusion clause or minimum requirement. In Iceland a party has to gain at least one constituency seat in order to qualify for any additional seats. In Norway a party

has to have gained 4 per cent of the vote before qualifying for additional seats. In Sweden 4 per cent of the total votes cast is required in order to qualify for additional seats, but where a minor party has gained 12 per cent of the vote in a particular constituency it qualifies for any distribution of additional members within that constituency. In order to qualify for the "additional member" seats in the Danish parliament, a party must have won at least one constituency seat, have gained 2 per cent of the total vote or reached the average number of votes per seat in two out of three of the principal areas (these are Copenhagen, the Islands, and Jutland). Despite the exclusion clause the number of parties in the *Folketing* doubled in 1973 from five to eleven, and yet the clause is not without effect: in 1990 of the thirteen parties contesting the elections, five gained no seats.

Allocation of the Seats to Candidates

Once it has been established which parties have gained parliamentary representation and how many seats each party is entitled to, the problem then is to determine which individuals should be elected. The parties play a major role in the nomination process in all the Nordic countries. Both Norway and Finland have laws determining which procedures are used by the parties in nominating their candidates; in Norway this law is only consultative. As a rule it is the parties' active membership who control the power of nomination, although the central executive bodies have, to varying degrees, the right to intervene in the selection of candidates by regional and local party organisations.

The power of the individual voter to affect which particular candidate is elected varies greatly among the Nordic countries. In Norway the voter has a formal right to strike names off and alter the order of a party's official list, but alterations of this kind have never actually had any effect on the results. (The rules in Norway are different, however, for elections to local authorities and were made use of by an alliance of voters in 1971 in order to elect female local council members). Hitherto the situation has been much the same in Sweden. For all practical purposes voters have not been able to affect the order in which the candidates are listed. But in 1994 a measure to increase the scope for election of individual candidates is being introduced. The measure allows the voter to cast a preferential party list on the ballot paper. Opportunities for voters to af-

fect the composition of parliament in terms of which particular candidates are elected are greatest in Finland. In formal terms elections to the Finnish parliament are wholly "personal", i.e. all candidates are elected as individuals. There is a circle on each voting paper in which the voter enters the number of his or her candidate. In the polling booths there are lists of each candidate's number, name, and party affiliation. In practice, however, elections in Finland are for political parties. Initially the votes for each candidate are counted and then accumulated by party to give a total vote for each party. This determines the allocation of seats in the constituency. Within each party those candidates with the highest number of votes are allocated the seats which the party has won. Political parties may form an electoral alliance in a particular constituency. The allocation of seats among the parties joined in an alliance is determined by the votes cast for their particular candidates. Parties taking part in an electoral alliance therefore try to concentrate their votes on only a few candidates. Finnish electoral law does permit non-party candidates to stand. The right of nomination is also enjoyed by "associations of electors" who need consist of no more than 100 electors in a constituency. The Finnish system of voting for individual candidates has often led to large changes in the composition of parliament. In 1983, for example, 76 new members were elected to the 200 seats of the Finnish parliament, 57 of whom replaced incumbent candidates who failed to gain enough votes.

The Danish system of nomination and allocation of seats is relatively complicated. The political parties are allowed to choose between various types of list to be presented to the electors. Each constituency is further divided into a number of *nomination districts*. Every ballot contains a list of all the parties and below the name of the party are the names of the candidates each party has nominated in the constituency. The elector casts his vote by marking a cross besides the name of a party or a candidate. Each party can choose between several different types of list. Under *parallel nomination*, candidates are listed alphabetically and since it is solely the number of votes cast for each candidate that determines which candidates are elected, this variant resembles the Finnish electoral system. *Constituency nomination* means that the party in each nomination district recommends a particular candidate; the name of this candidate is printed in bold type immediately below the name of the party on the ballot. The recommended candidate receives not only all personal votes in the constituency but all the party's votes in the nomination dis-

trict. A candidate's chances of being elected depend therefore both on whether the nomination district is a large one, and a "safe" one for the party, and on the number of personal votes. Parties opting for *party list* nomination recommend candidates to the constituency by ranking them in order of preference. The proportion of "personal" votes, i.e. votes cast for individual candidates, at Danish general elections varies between 45 and 50 per cent.

Parliamentary Elections

Tables 3.3 and 3.4 present an overall view of parliamentary elections in the Nordic countries. There are clear differences when it comes to parties to the left of the Social Democrats. The left-wing parties have been strongest in Iceland and Finland due to the significant role played by the Communist Party in the labour movement. Parties of the Left were however weakened during the eighties, especially in Finland as a result of the split between the Moscow-loyalist and the more reform-minded Communists. The position of the established Communist Party in Denmark is weak but because of the relative strength of the Socialist People's Party, the Danish Social Democrats face competition from the Left. Left-wing parties in Sweden have never gained more than 6 per cent of the vote since the years immediately following the Second World War. The strength of the left-wing Socialist parties has gone up and down in Norway. During the first years of the seventies they were on an upward march, mostly because of their opposition to Norway's membership of the European Community. They experienced another upward surge towards the end of the eighties, not least because of the importance of environmental issues.

The strength of the Social Democrats is in inverse proportion to the size of the left-wing parties. The Icelandic Social Democrats are the weakest among the Nordic countries. However, the Social Democrats in Finland have never won more than 30 per cent of the votes in the post-war period. The events of the early seventies proved a setback to the Social Democrats in both Denmark and Norway from which they have not completely recovered. Although the Social Democrats in Denmark gained 37–38 per cent of the votes in the elections of 1977 and 1979, during the eighties their results hovered around the 30 per cent mark.

Table 3.3 Election Results

<i>Denmark: Folketing</i>	1971	1973	1975	1977	1979	1981	1984	1987	1988	1990
Conservatives	16.7	9.2	5.5	8.5	12.5	14.5	23.4	20.8	19.3	16.0
Liberals	15.6	12.3	23.3	12.0	12.5	11.3	12.1	10.5	11.8	15.8
Social Liberals	14.3	11.2	7.1	3.6	5.4	5.1	5.5	6.2	5.6	3.5
Christian People's Party	2.0	4.0	5.3	3.4	2.6	2.3	2.7	2.4	2.0	2.3
Progress Party	—	15.9	13.6	14.6	11.0	8.9	3.6	4.8	9.0	6.4
Centre Democrats	—	7.8	2.2	6.4	3.2	8.3	4.6	4.8	4.7	5.1
Social Democrats	37.3	25.6	29.9	37.0	38.3	32.9	31.6	29.3	29.8	37.4
Socialist People's Party	9.1	6.0	5.0	3.9	5.9	11.3	11.5	14.6	13.0	8.3
Left Socialists	1.6	1.5	2.1	2.7	3.7	2.6	2.7	1.4	0.6	—
Communist Party	1.4	3.6	4.2	3.7	1.9	1.1	0.7	0.9	0.8	—
Legal Justice	1.7	2.9	1.8	3.3	2.6	1.4	1.5	0.5	—	0.5
Schleswig Party	0.2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Common Course	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2.2	1.9	1.8
Green Party	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.3	1.4	0.9
Turnout	87.2	88.7	88.2	88.0	85.6	83.2	88.4	86.7	85.7	82.8
<i>Finland: Eduskunta</i>	1970	1972	1975	1979	1983	1987	1991			
Coalition Party	18.0	17.6	18.4	21.7	22.1	23.1	19.3			
Centre Party	17.1	16.4	17.6	17.3	17.6	17.6	24.8			
Liberals	5.9	5.2	4.3	3.7	*	1.0	0.8			
Swedish People's Party	5.7	5.4	5.0	4.6	4.9	5.6	5.5			
Christian League	1.1	2.5	3.3	4.8	3.0	2.6	3.1			
Constitutional Party	—	—	1.6	1.2	0.4	0.2	0.3			
Rural Party	10.5	9.2	3.6	4.6	9.7	6.3	4.8			
Social Democrats	23.4	25.8	24.9	23.9	26.7	24.1	22.1			
Left Wing Alliance	16.6	17.0	18.9	17.9	14.0	9.4	10.1			
Democratic Alternative	—	—	—	—	—	4.2	—			
Green League	—	—	—	—	1.4	4.0	6.8			
<i>* Electoral pact with the Centre Party 1983</i>										
Turnout	82.2	81.4	73.8	75.3	75.7	72.1	68.4			
<i>Iceland: Althing</i>	1971	1974	1978	1979	1983	1987	1991			
Independence Party	36.2	42.7	32.7	35.4	38.5	27.2	38.6			
Citizen's Party/Liberals	—	—	—	—	—	10.9	1.2			
Progressive Party	25.3	24.9	16.9	24.9	18.5	18.9	18.9			
Left Liberal Alliance	8.9	4.6	3.3	—	—	—	—			
Social Democrats	10.5	9.1	22.0	17.4	11.7	15.2	15.5			
Social Democratic Alliance	—	—	—	—	7.3	0.2	0.3			
People's Alliance	17.1	18.3	22.9	19.7	17.3	13.3	14.4			
Women's Alliance	—	—	—	—	5.5	10.2	8.3			
Progressive Party (split)	—	—	—	—	—	1.2	—			
Turnout	90.4	91.4	90.3	89.3	88.6	90.1	87.6			

<i>Norway: Storting</i>	<i>1969</i>	<i>1973</i>	<i>1977</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1985</i>	<i>1989</i>	<i>1993</i>	
Conservatives	19.5	17.4	24.8	31.7	30.4	22.2	17.0	
Centre Party	10.5	11.0	8.6	6.7	6.6	6.5	16.7	
Liberals	9.4	3.5	3.2	3.9	3.1	3.2	3.6	
Liberal People's Party	—	3.4	1.4	0.5	0.5	0.0	0.0	
Christian Democrats	9.4	12.3	12.4	8.9	8.3	8.5	7.9	
Progress Party	—	5.0	1.9	4.5	3.7	13.0	6.3	
Labour Party	46.5	35.3	42.3	37.2	40.8	34.3	36.9	
Socialist Left Party	3.4	11.2	4.2	4.9	5.5	10.1	7.9	
Communist Party/Red Alliance	1.0	—	0.4	0.3	0.8	0.8	1.1	
Future for Finnmark	—	—	—	—	—	0.3	—	
The Greens	—	—	—	—	—	0.4	0.1	
<i>Turnout</i>	<i>83.8</i>	<i>80.2</i>	<i>82.9</i>	<i>82.0</i>	<i>84.4</i>	<i>83.2</i>	<i>75.8</i>	
<i>Sweden: Riksdag</i>	<i>1970</i>	<i>1973</i>	<i>1976</i>	<i>1979</i>	<i>1982</i>	<i>1985</i>	<i>1988</i>	<i>1991</i>
Conservatives	11.5	14.3	15.6	20.3	23.6	21.3	18.3	21.9
Centre Party	19.9	25.1	24.1	18.1	15.5	9.8	11.3	8.5
Liberals	16.2	9.4	11.1	10.6	5.9	14.2	12.2	9.1
Christian Democrats	1.8	1.8	1.4	1.4	1.9	2.6	2.9	7.1
Social Democrats	45.3	43.6	42.7	43.2	45.6	44.7	43.2	37.7
Left Party	4.8	5.3	4.8	5.6	5.6	5.4	5.8	4.5
Ecological Party	—	—	—	—	1.7	1.5	5.5	3.4
New Democracy	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	6.7
<i>Turnout</i>	<i>88.3</i>	<i>90.8</i>	<i>91.8</i>	<i>90.7</i>	<i>91.4</i>	<i>89.9</i>	<i>86.0</i>	<i>86.7</i>
<i>Åland: Landsting/Lagting</i>	<i>1979</i>	<i>1983</i>	<i>1987</i>	<i>1991</i>				
Conservatives	13.9	16.6	17.3	19.8				
Liberals	29.7	28.9	23.7	22.9				
Centre Party	42.5	35.6	28.7	30.2				
Social Democrats	11.9	16.5	14.0	14.5				
Communists	2.1	2.3	—	—				
The Greens	—	—	6.7	2.8				
Non-Partisan	—	—	7.0	9.7				
Free Åland	—	—	2.6	—				
<i>Turnout</i>	<i>60.0</i>	<i>64.4</i>	<i>64.3</i>	<i>62.4</i>				
<i>The Faroes: Lagting</i>	<i>1970</i>	<i>1974</i>	<i>1978</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>1984</i>	<i>1988</i>	<i>1990</i>	
Conservative People's Party	20.0	20.5	17.9	18.9	21.6	23.2	21.9	
Liberal Unionist Party	21.7	19.1	26.3	23.9	21.2	21.2	18.9	
Social Liberal Autonomy Party	5.6	7.2	7.2	8.4	8.5	7.1	8.8	
Christian People's Party	3.7	2.5	6.1	8.2	5.8	5.5	5.9	
Social Democrats	27.1	25.8	22.3	21.7	23.4	21.6	27.4	
Republican Party	21.9	22.5	20.3	19.0	19.5	19.2	14.7	
<i>Turnout</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>85.5</i>	<i>85.9</i>	<i>86.8</i>	<i>87.2</i>	<i>86.0</i>	

<i>Greenland: Landsting</i>	1979	1983	1984	1987	1991
Atássut Unionist Party	41.7	46.6	43.8	39.9	30.7
Siumut Progressive Party	46.1	42.3	44.1	39.8	37.5
Inuit Ataqatigiit Independence Party	4.4	10.6	12.1	15.3	19.5
Akulliit Partiiat Centre Party	—	—	—	—	9.5
Issittup Partiiat Polar Party	—	—	—	4.5	2.8
Turnout	69.6	75.1	66.8	69.6	68.0

The Norwegian Labour Party enjoyed a long period of stable and substantial electoral results – between 1933 and 1969 their share of the vote never fell below 40 per cent. Seen from this perspective, the results of the elections in 1973, 1981 and 1989 were defeats on a considerable scale. The first years of the seventies were a period of decline for the Social Democrats in Sweden as well. In 1976 when they gained 42.7 per cent of the vote, the Social Democrats failed to form the government. They recovered somewhat at the beginning of the eighties, but the years 1989–1990 saw a major decline in their opinion poll figures and the 1991 election was their worst performance since the nineteen twenties.

Although a variety of cleavages and conflicts have been significant in determining the current state of the party systems in the Nordic countries, there can be no doubt that the predominant one has been the left-right polarity, a fundamental difference of opinion about the extent of collective control over the economy and society. If a dividing line has to be drawn across the party system, then the most important one would separate on the one side the Socialist and Labour parties (the names vary) from the “bourgeois”, non-Socialist parties on the other. Three distinct periods can be clearly discerned. The first period, the nineteen twenties and thirties, was a growth phase in which the labour movement steadily entrenched its electoral support, although this upward curve does show a number of setbacks and interruptions. The parliamentary representation of the labour movement expanded particularly during the years of crisis after 1933. There were exceptional circumstances during the Second World War, but immediately after the end of the war they enjoyed great success. The second period which lasted from 1945 to the end of the sixties was one of high and stable voting figures. A certain diminution started at the beginning of the seventies; the elections of 1970 brought losses for the left in Finland and Sweden, with the crash coming

Table 3.4 Distribution of Seats

<i>Denmark: Folketing</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>1973</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>1977</i>	<i>1979</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1984</i>	<i>1987</i>	<i>1988</i>	<i>1990</i>
Conservatives	31	16	10	15	22	26	42	38	35	30
Liberals	30	22	42	21	22	21	22	19	22	29
Social Liberals	27	20	13	6	10	9	10	11	10	7
Christian People's Party	0	7	9	6	5	4	5	4	4	4
Progress Party	—	28	24	26	20	16	6	9	16	12
Centre Democrats	—	13	3	10	6	15	8	9	9	9
Social Democrats	70	46	53	65	68	59	56	54	55	69
Socialist People's Party	17	11	9	7	11	20	21	27	24	15
Left Socialists	0	0	4	5	6	5	5	0	0	—
Communist Party	0	6	7	7	0	0	0	0	0	—
Legal Justice	0	5	0	6	5	0	0	0	—	0
Schleswig Party	0	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Common Course	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	0	0
Green Party	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	0	0
Representatives from the Faroes	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Representatives from Greenland	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
<i>Total</i>	<i>179</i>	<i>179</i>	<i>179</i>	<i>179</i>	<i>179</i>	<i>179</i>	<i>179</i>	<i>179</i>	<i>179</i>	<i>179</i>
<i>Finland: Eduskunta</i>	<i>1970</i>	<i>1972</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>1979</i>	<i>1983</i>	<i>1987</i>	<i>1991</i>			
Coalition Party	37	34	35	47	44	53	40			
Centre Party	37	35	39	36	38	40	55			
Liberals	8	7	9	4	0	0	1			
Swedish People's Party	12	10	10	10	11	13	12			
Christian League	1	4	9	9	3	5	8			
Constitutional Party	—	—	1	0	1	0	0			
Rural Party	18	18	2	7	17	9	7			
Social Democrats	51	55	54	52	57	56	48			
Left Wing Alliance	36	37	40	35	27	16	19			
Democratic Alternative	—	—	—	—	—	4	—			
Green League	—	—	—	—	2	4	10			
<i>Total</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>200</i>			
<i>Iceland: Althing</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>1974</i>	<i>1978</i>	<i>1979</i>	<i>1983</i>	<i>1987</i>	<i>1991</i>			
Independence Party	22	25	20	21	23	18	26			
Citizen's Party/Liberals	—	—	—	—	—	7	0			
Progressive Party	17	17	12	17	14	13	13			
Left Liberal Alliance	5	2	0	—	—	—	—			
Social Democrats	6	5	14	10	6	10	10			
Social Democratic Alliance	—	—	—	—	4	0	0			
People's Alliance	10	11	14	11	10	8	9			
Women's Alliance	—	—	—	—	3	6	5			
Others	—	—	—	—	—	1	—			
<i>Total</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>63</i>			

Norway: Storting	1969	1973	1977	1981	1985	1989	1993
Conservatives	29	29	41	54	50	37	28
Centre Party	20	21	12	11	12	11	32
Liberals	13	2	2	2	0	0	1
Liberal People's Party	—	1	0	0	0	—	—
Christian Democrats	14	20	22	15	16	14	13
Progress Party	—	4	0	4	2	22	10
Labour Party	74	62	76	65	71	63	67
Socialist Left Party	0	16	2	4	6	17	13
Communist Party/Red Alliance	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Future for Finnmark	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
The Greens	—	—	—	—	—	0	0
Total	150	155	155	155	157	165	165

Sweden: Riksdag	1970	1973	1976	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991
Conservatives	41	51	55	73	86	76	66	80
Centre Party	71	90	86	64	56	43	42	31
Liberals	58	34	39	38	21	51	44	33
Christian Democrats	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	26
Social Democrats	163	156	152	154	166	159	156	138
Left Party	17	19	17	20	20	19	21	16
Ecological Party	—	—	—	—	—	—	20	—
New Democracy	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	25
Total	350	350	349	349	349	349	349	349

Åland: Landsting/Lagting	1979	1983	1987	1991
Conservatives	4	5	5	6
Liberals	9	9	8	7
Centre Party	14	11	9	10
Social Democrats	3	5	4	4
Communists	0	0	—	—
The Greens	—	—	2	0
Non-Partisan	—	—	2	3
Total	30	30	30	30

The Faroes: Lagting	1970	1974	1978	1980	1984	1988	1990
Conservative People's Party	5	5	6	6	7	8	7
Liberal Unionist Party	6	5	8	8	7	7	6
Social Liberal Autonomy Party	1	2	2	3	2	2	3
Christian People's Party	1	1	2	2	2	2	2
Social Democrats	7	7	8	7	8	7	10
Republican Party	6	6	6	6	6	6	4
Total	26	26	32	32	32	32	32

<i>Greenland: Landsting</i>	<i>1979</i>	<i>1983</i>	<i>1984</i>	<i>1987</i>	<i>1991</i>
Atássut Unionist Party	8	12	11	11	8
Siumut Progressive Party	13	12	11	11	11
Inuit Ataqatigiit Independence	0	2	3	4	5
Akulliit Partiiat Centre Party	—	—	—	—	2
Issittup Partiiá Polar Party	—	—	—	1	1
Total	21	26	25	27	27

to Denmark and Norway in 1973. Some degree of recovery occurred in the years 1977–79; the Icelandic Social Democrats had, for example, huge successes in the elections of 1978 but the position of both the Social Democrats and the parties of the Left was on average weaker throughout the eighties than during the previous decades. Of course, average figures of this kind conceal a great many exceptions and local variations but the overwhelming trend can be traced in each country. The years between the wars were the break-through period. The decades immediately after the Second World War were the period of major consolidation. The most recent decades have seen increasing losses.

Whenever the bloc of non-Socialist, or “bourgeois”, parties has been strengthening its position, there have also been great changes in the relative strengths of the parties that have constituted the bloc.

Farmers’ parties are represented in all the parliaments of the Nordic countries, but are strongest in Iceland, Finland and Sweden. The results of the most recent elections have shown a decrease in support compared with previous phases. The Finnish Centre Party gained over 20 per cent of the votes throughout the years between 1920 and 1970. The Swedish Centre Party crowned a sequence of electoral triumphs by gaining 25 per cent of the votes in the election of 1973. That same year the Norwegian Centre Party won 11 per cent, its best result since the War. On several occasions the Danish Liberals have gained over 20 per cent, the last occasion being in 1975. In all these countries the Farmer’s parties made poor showings at the beginning of the eighties.

Throughout all the Nordic countries, the Liberals are in a weak position at present. Iceland is a special case, as the Liberals merged in 1929 with the Independence Party. Finland does not have a strong Liberal party. For several years the Liberal Party has been without independent representation in the Finnish parliament. Although the manifesto of the Swedish People’s Party in Finland makes clear its social-liberal princi-

ples, it is a special interest party representing a linguistic minority. For many years the Social Liberals in Denmark have been winning less than ten per cent of the vote but their results during the eighties of slightly over 5 per cent were the party's worst ever. Of course, if the votes for the Liberals (*Venstre*) are included as well, then the proportion of liberal voters in Denmark is higher.

Elections to the Norwegian *Storting* in 1973 took place in the shadow of the referendum on the Common Market that had been held the previous year. The consequences were most serious for the Social Democrats, and for the Liberals. The leadership of the Labour Party had come out in favour of Norway's membership of the European Community but a significant section of the party membership were opposed. This conflict brought new life to a long-standing conflict between the smallholders and fishermen of the outlying areas and the urban culture of the centre. The Labour Party's share of the vote fell from 46.5 to 35.3 per cent, whereas the Socialist Electoral Alliance (which was against EEC membership) formed prior to the elections gained a lot of ground. The results were even more serious for the Liberals. The party had split over the EEC issue and both factions formed their own parties, neither of which did particularly well. The Liberals and the Liberal People's Party were reunited in 1988, and finally won a single seat in the 1993 *Storting* election.

The Liberal Party in Sweden fell back sharply during the seventies and in the elections of 1982 gained 5.9 per cent of the votes which represented the party's worst ever election performance. They recovered strongly by the next election when their share of the vote more than doubled. But at the elections in 1988 and 1991, they lost a lot of ground once more.

The weak position of the established parties of the centre can be explained to some extent by their having to compete with the protest parties formed during the seventies. But the lion's share of their votes was lost to the Conservative parties, which gained ground markedly at the end of the seventies and in the beginning of the eighties. 1987 saw the Finnish Conservatives win their highest poll result ever. The same trend applied to the Conservative parties in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. They enjoyed huge electoral successes at the beginning of the eighties. The Danish Conservatives gained 23.4 per cent in 1984, the Norwegian Conservatives 31.7 per cent in 1981, and the Swedish Conservatives 23.6 per cent in 1982. But they fell back considerably towards the end of the eighties, and this was particularly true for the Norwegian Conserva-

tives. The increased volatility of the electors can be readily perceived in the rapid changes of fortune of the non-Socialist parties.

A general trend that can be discerned in the electoral results of the last few decades is a tendency for the number of votes cast for the established parties to fall. At the beginning of the seventies, those parties traditionally included within the five-party model of the Nordic parliamentary systems gained over 93 per cent of the votes. Twenty years later their share had fallen to 79 per cent, which means that at present one voter in five is voting for a party outside the traditional party system.

Presidential Elections

Elections are also held for the office of head of state in the two Nordic republics, Iceland and Finland. The president of Iceland is directly elected by universal suffrage for a period of four years. In theory, candidates can be nominated by any group of at least 1500 electors and the president is elected by a simple majority. In 1988 Mme. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir was re-elected by a huge majority (with 92.7 per cent of the votes). The outcome of this election served to prove that the election of the Icelandic president is more a matter of the choice of person than party.

The Icelandic constitution provides, in theory, for the removal of an incumbent president. This would require that three-quarters of the members of the *Althing* supported the proposal and that it was approved in a popular referendum.

The election of the Finnish president, whose term of office lasts for six years, was originally indirect. On several occasions, however, the normal electoral procedures have been set aside and a president appointed by emergency rules (table 3.5). Under the original system the voters appointed an electoral college made up of 301 electors. The political parties nominated the candidates to the electoral college. The electors chose the president by secret ballot. If no presidential candidate gained more than half the votes cast, a new round of voting was held. If this in turn did not lead to one candidate having an absolute majority, a third vote was held between the two candidates who gained most votes in the second round. In situations where there were many candidates competing and no single candidate had a majority, the system allowed some scope for tactical manoeuvring. In 1925 a president was elected who had only

Table 3.5 Presidential Elections in Finland, 1919-1988

<i>President</i>	<i>Party Affiliation</i>	<i>Period in Office</i>	<i>Electoral Procedure</i>	<i>Round</i>	<i>Number of Votes</i>
Ståhlberg, K.J.	Progressive Party	1919-1925	Exceptional		
Relander, L.K.	Agrarian League	1925-1931	Normal	3	172
Svinhufvud, P.E.	Coalition League	1931-1937	Normal	3	151
Kallio, K.	Agrarian League	1937-1940	Normal	2	177
Ryti, R.	Progressive Party	1940-1943	Exceptional	1	288
		1943-1944	Exceptional	1	269
Mannerheim, C.G.	No party	1944-1946	Exceptional		
Paasikivi, J.K.	Coalition League	1946-1950	Exceptional		
		1950-1956	Normal	1	171
Kekkonen, U.K.	Agrarian League	1956-1962	Normal	1	171
		1962-1968	Normal	3	151
		1968-1974	Normal	1	199
		1974-1978	Exceptional		
		1978-1981	Normal	1	259
Koivisto, M.	Social Democrats	1982-1988	Normal	1	167
		1988-1994	Normal	2	189

played a shadowy role in the general election. When Urho Kekkonen was first elected president in 1956, the alliance backing him had only gained the support of 26.9 of the voters. More recently, however, the results of the electoral college have corresponded more closely with the voters' verdict. This meant that in 1982 Mauno Koivisto could be elected president in the very first round of voting.

The electoral rules were changed for the election of the president in 1988 and the possibility of a direct election to the office introduced. If a presidential candidate gained an absolute majority of the votes, he would be immediately elected to office but if no candidate gained an absolute majority, then the election would pass to the electoral college – which is what in fact happened in 1988. President Koivisto won the election with 47.8 per cent of the votes cast but since his tally was less than the 50 per cent required, the election passed to the college. It was not until the second round of voting that Koivisto was able to gather enough votes to be re-elected.

A further constitutional revision altered the electoral procedure once again. The electoral college was abolished for the presidential election of 1994 when the president was directly elected by the people, as in France.

As no candidate gained an absolute majority in the first round, a second round was held three weeks later between the two candidates who gained most votes (table 3.6). In this second round Defense Minister Elisabeth Rehn of the Swedish Liberal Party was beaten by the Social Democratic candidate Martti Ahtisaari who became president.

European Elections

As a member of the European Union, Denmark also elects representatives to the European Parliament. Direct elections have been held, as in all the member states, every fifth year since 1979. In the other community countries, the party system for the European elections is usually identical with that operating in national elections. Denmark is an exception in this regard. In addition to the parties that contest elections to the *Folketing*, those opposed to Community membership form their own party, the Popular Movement Against the EC. This party has won around twenty per cent of the votes at the three elections that have been held. To some extent the European elections constitute a means for the expression of opinion on the country's membership of the European Union. It should however be pointed out that participation in European elections is relatively low, the turn-out being ca. 50 per cent. The candidates are relatively unknown to the general public and the elections attract little public interest. The European elections have had no repercussions on Danish domestic politics and the European issue has been largely overshadowed in national elections.

Voting Behaviour

Net changes within the party systems of the Nordic countries have increased: percentage shifts from one election to another have been greater during the last decade than in the whole of the preceding era. Instability in the party system, by comparison with Europe as well, has been greatest in Denmark and Norway. One important explanation has, of course, been the growth of new parties which have increased the electoral op-

Table 3.6 The Finnish Presidential Election in 1994

<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Share of the Vote</i>
<i>First round, 16 January</i>		
<i>(voter turn-out: 78.4 per cent)</i>		
Martti Ahtisaari	Social Democrats	25.9
Elisabeth Rehn	Swedish People's Party	22.0
Paavo Väyrynen	Centre Party	19.5
Raimo Ilaskivi	Coalition Party	15.2
Keijo Korhonen	Independence Front (Centre Party)	5.8
Claes Andersson	Left Wing Alliance	3.8
Pertti Virtanen	Beggars' League	3.0
Eeva Kuuskoski	Change '94 (Centre Party)	2.6
Toimi Kankaanniemi	Christian League	1.0
Sulo Aittoniemi	Liberal Party	1.0
Pekka Tiainen	Movement against EC (Communist)	0.2
<i>Second round, 6 February</i>		
<i>(voter turn-out: 78.7 per cent)</i>		
Martti Ahtisaari	Social Democrats	53.9
Elisabeth Rehn	Swedish People's Party	46.1

tions of individual voters. But gross change as well, the proportion of individual voters switching parties, has grown in scale. Even in the Swedish party system, which has long been stable, about a third of the voters in 1991 switched parties, whereas in the mid-fifties this proportion was approximately seven per cent. In Finland, too, a third of the voters now switch parties between elections. In Norway, the proportion of voters switching between parties was 24 per cent in the election of 1977 and as much as 38 per cent in 1989.

Increasing political volatility has a number of different causes. Social and geographical mobility has dissolved old ties to a clearly defined social and political milieu. Where once the local party organisation, colleagues and work-mates, and the party newspaper were the most important conduits of political information, political communication today is dominated by the national mass media. It would have been extremely difficult for the protest parties in Denmark, lacking any form of traditional party organisation as they did, to make such a swift breakthrough without the help of television.

Table 3.7 Danish Elections to the European Parliament

	Percentage Share of the Vote			Number of Seats		
	1979	1984	1989	1979	1984	1989
<i>Non-Socialist Parties (in favour of the EC)</i>						
Liberals	14.5	12.5	16.6	3	2	3
Conservatives	14.0	20.8	13.3	2	4	2
Centre Democratic Party	6.2	6.6	7.9	1	1	2
Christian People's Party	1.8	2.7	2.7	0	0	0
<i>Parties conditionally in favour of the EC</i>						
Progress Party	5.8	3.5	5.3	1	0	0
Social Liberal Party	3.3	3.1	2.8	0	0	0
Social Democratic Party	21.9	19.5	23.3	3	3	4
<i>Parties opposed to the EC</i>						
Socialist People's Party	4.7	9.2	9.1	1	1	1
Minor left-wing parties	6.9	1.3	-	0	0	-
Popular movement against the EC	20.9	20.8	18.9	4	4	4
<i>Voter Turn-out</i>	47.8	52.4	46.1			

Source: Worre 1989

Decreased Class Voting

It is hardly surprising in this light that the anchoring of the parties in the social classes has tended to weaken. Younger voters especially vote against the old established patterns. But it would be precipitate to conclude on the basis of this widespread pattern of change that the groups supporting the different parties are now identical. On the contrary, significant social cleavages remain in all the Nordic countries.

The social conflicts of the past that gave birth to the parties still leave their mark on electoral behaviour. By comparison with the party systems of Continental Europe, the Nordic countries are exceptional in that voters' occupations are still of major electoral significance, as opposed to religious and regional factors which are of decisive importance elsewhere.

Labour Parties

In Sweden, Denmark and Norway, it is the Social Democrats who are the largest party of the working class. Approximately two thirds of Swedish workers vote Social Democrat and the corresponding proportion in Denmark and Norway hovers around the 50 per cent mark. If we go back in time a few decades, these figures were even higher. The Scandinavian Social Democrats have tended to lose ground among their core voter groups not least as a result of low levels of support among young workers who no longer have roots in the traditional environments of the industrial worker. This should make it all the more surprising that the Social Democratic parties have not lost more votes, given that their support is dropping among workers, and given that the industrial labour force as a social category is a stagnant, even diminishing one. The explanation is that the loss of votes is partly compensated for by the fact that the Social Democrats have improved their position among certain groups, notably white-collar workers, where the dominance of the non-Socialist parties has diminished in consequence.

The situation is different in Finland since the working class vote is split between two parties. Although the Social Democrats are the larger of the two parties, the Left-Wing Alliance has a larger proportion of workers among their electors. While the Social Democrats have widespread electoral support among workers, they also have an important share of the middle class vote.

The Communist parties in Norway and Denmark are numerically weak, even within the working class. Voters for the remaining parties on the left have certain defining social characteristics – a key element of the support for the Danish Left Socialists is that of young voters in the new middle class. The Norwegian Socialist Left Party, the Swedish Left Party, and the Icelandic People's Alliance are all supported by a relatively large number of highly educated younger voters, especially among public sector employees, in addition to their working class vote. What all the parties on the left have in common is the particular age structure of their voters. These parties have become a means of political expression for the environmental, peace and women's movements of the seventies and eighties. The labour parties in Iceland do not win more than a third of the votes of workers.

Farmers' Parties

The Farmers' parties of the Nordic countries have kept their particular social identity. The proportion of farmers who vote for the Swedish Centre Party is ca 65 per cent, while the Liberals in Denmark carried between 54 and 70 per cent of agricultural voters during the seventies. The Norwegian Centre Party's share of the farming vote used to hover between 50 and 60 per cent, but fell to 40 per cent in the election of 1981, and to 31 per cent in 1989. Approximately two thirds of Finnish farmers vote for the Centre Party. But support for the Centre parties is not limited solely to farmers and agricultural workers. There is a degree of support for the Farmers' parties in other social groups as well, particularly in sparsely populated areas and among electors with ancestral connections to farming. The performance of the Swedish Centre Party provides evidence that a party's support does not necessarily weaken because the numbers of electors in its core support groups have diminished – during the sixties and at the beginning of the seventies it was able to attract large new groups of voters as a result of its policies on the environment and on issues to do with decentralisation.

Conservative Parties

Although Conservative parties became the second largest party in Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland during the eighties, their supporters are far from representing a specific median group of the population. It is still the case that the probability of voting for a Conservative party is greatest among electors with high incomes and wealth, who have further education and hold managerial positions in commerce and administration. The largest share of their voting gains in recent years has come from electors who had previously voted for another non-Socialist party. It is the parties of the centre who have suffered relatively large voting losses. Another factor is that Social Democrat voters have switched to one of the Conservative parties; vote-switching across the divide between the political blocs is normally limited to switching between the Social Democrats and one of the parties of the centre. In the Norwegian election of 1981, 5 per cent of those who voted Social Democrat in 1977 switched to the Conservatives. A similar phenomenon occurred in Finland in the fifties. In Sweden, however, vote-switching on a comparable

scale from the Social Democrats to the Conservatives has been much rarer until now.

Liberal Parties

The class structure of the party systems of the Nordic countries is demonstrated by the fact that the voter groups of most parties have a clearly defined social profile. This is particularly true for the Labour, Farmers' and Conservative parties but less so for the Liberal parties. Although they encompass an over-representation of small businessmen and white-collar workers, the social composition of supporters of the Liberal parties does not deviate that much from the average. If the electoral core of the Liberal parties is difficult to distinguish in social terms, it is also comparatively unstable in political terms. The proportion of loyal voters who identify strongly with the party is lower for the Liberals than for those parties with a more clearly defined class base.

Generational Factors

In comparison with occupation, other defining social factors play a subordinate role in determining voter behaviour. With regard to age there are no great differences on the whole, but since younger voters are more volatile than older ones differences may occur at particular elections. The parties of the Left attracted a large influx of younger voters during the seventies. It would be mistaken to conclude from this that young people in general are more drawn to the Left. An example to the contrary was provided by the Norwegian election of 1989, when the strongly right-wing Progress Party was supported by 20 per cent of first-time voters.

Women

Gender is not a particularly decisive factor in the choice of party; the distribution of votes between parties is roughly the same whether the voter is male or female. But there are some differences. Opinion polls have shown that women in general have a more restrictive cultural view, are more strongly supportive of demands for environmental protection and more negative in their attitude to nuclear power; on the other hand there

is little difference in attitudes between men and women when it comes to left-right issues.

Two factors jointly explain why Iceland has a special women's party, the Women's Alliance. The party's social base is made up mostly of younger, well-educated women who have entered the labour market in recent years, particularly in the public sector. They are demanding better career opportunities, equal wages, and child care. These factors are not unique to Iceland, but there the established parties have been slow to respond. The number of women elected to positions of political responsibility has lagged behind the rest of the Nordic countries. The combination of social discontent and a lack of openness in the political system explains the success of this newly formed party. In the general election of 1987, 22 per cent of women and 5 per cent of men voted for the Women's Alliance.

Regions

Regional political differences in the Nordic countries primarily reflect the different social composition of the groups which support the various parties. In some regional areas, a number of distinctive political characteristics have been established; although some of them are on the way out. In geographic terms, support for the Conservative parties in Sweden and Finland is unevenly distributed: weakest in the north, strongest in southern Finland and central and southern Sweden. The link between rural farming communities and the vote for the Centre parties can be clearly seen. The Finnish Centre Party is particularly strong in northern Finland. Norway's Christian Democrats and Liberals are strongest in southern and western Norway which is traditionally antipathetic to the centre. The Norwegian Labour Party has long been strongly represented in northern Norway. The relatively strong position of the Social Democrats in northern parts of Sweden and Norway provides a sharp contrast to the corresponding areas in Finland and Iceland.

Internal Structure

Increasing political volatility during the seventies has led to speculation that the party political system as a whole is going through a fundamental crisis. It was the reversals in Danish and Norwegian politics in 1973 in particular which fed speculation that time was up for the established parties. Even though the Doomsday prophecies were premature, there is no doubting that the political parties of the present are faced with a number of problems.

The ways in which the parties function have altered in significant respects. In common with most of the western democracies, the Nordic countries have legislated to provide public funding for the political parties. Financial support for the parties is least extensive in Denmark, where a system for publicly funding the political parties, comparable to the systems operating in the other Nordic countries, was not introduced until 1987. In some cases, as much as 80 to 90 per cent of the party finances comes from the public purse. This has meant a sharp reduction in the importance of the contributions of individual members. The crucial importance of the mass media, especially television, for communication between politicians and voters has resulted in a powerful focusing of attention on the party leader and a small number of leading politicians. This kind of change applies to all the parties.

In one respect, there is a trend towards convergence. When the modern political parties made their first appearance at the turn of the century, their organisational methods were quite different. The Labour parties adopted the same style of organisation as the German Social Democrats with its emphasis on mass membership and a well-developed network of party organisations at local level. So too the non-Socialist parties which began as minor parliamentary groupings gradually went on to develop nationwide party organisations. The Farmers' parties had close, though unofficial, links with those organisations representing the interests of the agricultural community, just as there were traditional links between the Liberal parties and the non-Conformist and temperance movements. The Conservative parties have also built up nationwide membership organisations. Evidence that this form of organisation is still not considered outdated was provided by the deliberate development in the seventies on the part of the Norwegian Conservative Party of local party branches in areas where it had previously been weak.

Efforts by the parties to increase their membership have gone largely

unrewarded, although this is not the whole picture. Some examples of growing membership can be found; the Norwegian Conservatives increased their numbers during the seventies. Political activity in local party branches in Finland has shown a tendency to increase. But in general the political parties are faced with severe recruitment problems. Decline in party membership has been most marked in Denmark. In part the decline can be explained by the fact that the Danish political parties are unable to offer their local activists opportunities for election to political positions of responsibility. The number of positions on elected bodies in Denmark, primarily because of the merging of local authorities, is less than half that of its neighbouring countries.

The nature of party activity at local level has changed. As a result of the increased importance of the mass media, the contribution made by the local membership at election time has become less decisive. The age of the traditional mass-member parties seems in this regard to be over. The chief importance of local party organisations nowadays is to nominate candidates and recruit members to serve on local authority bodies.

4

Parliaments

On the whole, party discipline in the Nordic parliaments is strong. Members rarely vote against their party's line when voting on decisive issues, without first obtaining permission from their parliamentary group. The activities of the party groups in carrying out the task of the representation of the people is left entirely unregulated by the constitutions, but can of course be restricted by the particular procedures of each party. In general the parliamentary group of each party is obliged to follow the general political guidelines laid down by the executive bodies of their party organisations, but there is often a considerable degree of latitude as to how general guidelines are to be interpreted in particular cases. Despite increased political instability, there has been no increase in the number of internal splits occurring within the political parties. Party cohesion is still very strong. The parliamentary party groups continue to maintain party discipline on the majority of occasions on which a vote is taken.

The Representative

Various studies on the composition of the parliaments show that the social composition of the electorate is not reflected in that of their elected representatives. There is an over-representation among members of parliament of older people, of men, and of people with higher education. The electoral system only guarantees that those elected are representative in the broadest sense in party and geographic terms. In some respects the extent of this bias in the social composition of the parliaments

has diminished. The proportion of women has risen during recent years (see chapter 9 for further information).

A study of the members of the Danish *Folketing* in 1980 showed that views on the nature of the duties of the political representative differed widely between various parties (Damgaard 1982). Parties to the left of the Social Democrats conceived of themselves as party representatives, representing specific groups within the population. Conservative members saw themselves as representing not only their party but their constituency as well. A political party should, from the Conservative viewpoint, represent first and foremost the whole population and not simply certain groups. The view of the individual representative should take precedence over the party line when they fail to coincide. The Social Democrat members held views that put them somewhere in between the more absolute viewpoints of the Right and the Far Left. They emphasised not only the interests of the party but those of the constituency as well; they also stressed the importance of representing specific organisations and groups. The majority of Social Democrats did, however, think that their most important role was to look after the interests of the community as a whole and not to give priority to the interests of specific classes or groups.

A Swedish study carried out a few years later revealed a somewhat different picture (Holmberg 1989). The most distinctive feature of the ideological positions held by Swedish members of parliament on the matter of representation was the central importance of their particular party. Even non-Socialist politicians now saw their most important responsibility as representing their party. Moreover, there was a strong element of group representation: individual members saw themselves as representing salaried employees, for example, or farmers, businessmen, women, or young people. Local constituency issues also played a relatively major role in this regard.

The Legal Status of the Elected Representative

Before the advent of democracy there was a variety of eligibility qualifications that excluded large sections of the population from standing as parliamentary candidates. Nowadays the rules governing eligibility are basically the same as those governing the right to vote; this is the case in Sweden, for example. Occasionally, still extant traces of the doctrine

of the separation of powers impose further limitations. In Iceland neither the president nor the judges who sit in the Supreme Court may be elected to the *Althing*. In Norway diplomats and civil servants in government ministries are ineligible. The same is true in Finland for the Attorney General, Supreme Court Judges, the Parliamentary Ombudsman, as well as members of the armed forces on active service. According to the Danish constitution, a person is ineligible who has been convicted of an action "that is universally considered to make him unworthy of being a member of the *Folketing*"; this provision has been used on a small number of occasions.

Behind the notion of parliamentary privilege lies the idea that, once elected, the representative should not be obstructed in the execution of his duties. No external authority should be able to take his seat away from him, although in most countries parliament itself has the right to expel a member for a number of specific reasons. The two most commonly occurring reasons are that, having been elected, the representative in question has ceased to be eligible or that he has been convicted of a serious offence. This option exists in Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Sweden. The Finnish parliament can also expel a member who has been absent without leave. Only Norway has no provision for the *Storting* to expel one of its members.

There are a variety of ways in which a representative may resign of his own free will. In Denmark it is sufficient for the member to inform the Speaker of his intention. In Sweden parliament's permission is required, in Finland there has to be a lawful excuse or other reason approved by parliament. A member of the Norwegian parliament only has the right to resign if he becomes a minister.

In all the Nordic countries members of the Government have the right to be present and to speak in parliament, but they may not vote. There are special seating arrangements for ministers at the plenary session of parliament. Members of the Danish and Finnish parliaments are seated by party. Members of the Swedish and Norwegian parliaments, however, are seated by constituency.

Parliamentary Procedures

The burden of work on members of parliament has increased in line with the extension of the field of operations of the state. Seen from the longer-term perspective of history, the parliaments have become institutionalised. The national assemblies and meetings of the Estates of the past were called when the monarch thought it appropriate, and several years could pass between assemblies. Current constitutional arrangements in all the Nordic countries stipulate that parliament assembles every year. The parliamentary year starts in October in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, whereas the parliamentary session in Finland and Iceland follows the calendar year. Parliament does not normally meet during the summer, but can be recalled for an extraordinary sitting by the Government in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, by the president in Iceland and Finland, or by a minority of members of parliament in Denmark and Sweden.

However, extending the length of the parliamentary session has not proved adequate in meeting the increased burden of work. In his thesis (1977) on the Danish *Folketing*, Damgaard points out three different ways of increasing parliamentary efficiency: time-saving, the delegation of work, and specialisation. Previous legislative procedures used to be very time-consuming. The minutes of the last meeting were read out, the Bill before parliament was read through in its entirety and a vote was taken on each clause. Nowadays, written procedures have taken over. Restrictions on the time taken by each speaker have been introduced in Denmark, Norway and Sweden; parliament itself decides on the form of these restrictions. Voting used to be conducted using time-consuming methods such as by roll-call or by ballot. Electronic voting equipment has been installed. In order for a vote to be valid there is no requirement for a minimum number of members to be present in Finland or Sweden. Denmark, Norway and Iceland, however, require a quorum of at least half the members of parliament.

The work of elected representatives has been made easier, now that parliaments have been equipped with the resources of a modern administrative apparatus. Day to day activities are managed by a special civil service staff and the members have access to secretarial help, with a library and assistants to provide information on a variety of matters.

Political Professionalisation

The duties of a member of parliament have increasingly become a full-time occupation. The time is long past when the elected representative continued to do his everyday job and regarded time spent in parliament as something of a leisure activity. Now that these duties have become so demanding that they correspond to a full-time job, elected representatives have been awarded full salary and pension benefits. The pattern of recruitment has changed as well. Nowadays the way to enter parliament is based on work for, or employment in, a political party or allied organisation. The evolution of the work of the politician into a full-time occupation and indeed into a social category of its own is a direct consequence of the development of democracy.

Parliamentary Committees

Probably the most significant means of increasing the efficiency of the workings of parliament has been the specialisation of the members. In earlier periods the content of legislation was more specific and concrete, it had more limited social consequences and its effects on financial and administrative matters could be more easily foreseen. No member today can acquire detailed knowledge about every area of political concern. During the nineteenth century, as a result of the need for specialisation and for the division of labour, the committee system was first developed as a means of organising the work of the members of parliament. Since that time the committee system has grown in importance, and its ways of working have become firmly established. In Denmark the number of standing committees is 23, in Sweden 16, in Norway and Finland 13, and in Iceland it is 12. Members are appointed on the general principle of proportionality, although larger parties tend to be over-represented. The issues dealt with by each committee coincide, except in Finland, with the affairs of particular government ministries. The most important task carried out by the committees is to prepare issues prior to debate and legislation by the parliament meeting in plenary session. The meetings of the committees are not open to the public in any of the Nordic countries. In all five countries, committees have the right to summon government representatives to provide further information. Committees have become of enormous significance, not least in Finland, in the formation of political consensus.

Damgaard's study of the *Folketing* revealed a clearly discernible pattern of recruitment to the various committees. Parties usually appointed those people with a connection of some kind to the issues dealt with by the committee. This has led to an over-representation of farmers on the agricultural committee, teachers on the educational committee, and members with links to the housing sector on the housing committee. Moreover there was a marked degree of stability over time. Three quarters of the members who were theoretically entitled to retain their committee membership in the following session did, in fact, do so. This form of inertia was particularly pronounced among members with strong connections to a particular sector. These results have been confirmed by Swedish and Norwegian studies.

Legislation

The crucial role played by parliament is embodied in the rules governing legislative procedures. Although the assent of the head of state is required before a Bill becomes law in Finland, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland, in the event of conflict it is parliament both in theory and practice that has the final say in Finland and Norway. The decisions of parliament almost always become law. In the constitution of 1974, Sweden took this to its logical conclusion and recognised parliament as the sole legislative authority. In accordance with the principle of the sovereignty of the people, it is their elected representatives who now exercise the supreme legislative power.

But it would be misleading to conclude on the basis of these constitutional statutes that it is parliament alone that actually determines the contents of legislative measures. In reality the vast majority of new laws are brought into being as a result of government initiatives, and as such they have been prepared in the course of a long process in which administrative bodies, legal authorities, and various interest groups in society have all brought their influence to bear. The role of parliament has become one of making the final decision on Bills put before it, making what minor additions and changes it deems necessary, and by assenting to new laws, lending them legitimacy. Were a politically important Bill not to gain a sufficient majority, the support of parliament for the Government would be immediately put in question. On the other hand, dur-

ing periods of minority government, parliament can become a real centre of power and a forum in which compromises and agreements are arrived at among the parties.

Legislative Initiatives

The right of Government to initiate legislation is written into all the Nordic constitutions. In Norway, besides the usual kind of parliamentary bills, there are what are known as “parliamentary announcements” (*stortingsmeldinger*). These do not contain detailed legal texts and are used by the Government to provide the *Storting* with an opportunity to hold a debate on the general principles involved in major, controversial issues before a final version of the Bill is put before the members. On occasion, Finland also makes use of a two-tier procedural method: while a bill is still in its draft form, the Government may initiate a debate about the general principles involved in the proposed law.

All the Nordic countries recognise the right in principle of individual members to put bills forward. Naturally enough this opportunity is most often made use of by members of the opposition. The extent to which such opportunities may actually result in legislation differs among the Nordic countries. In Sweden and Finland, members of parliament have the right to move bills on whatever matter they choose during a few weeks at the beginning of the parliamentary year. In tandem with Bills proposed by the Government they may also move motions within the area of concern covered by the Bill. A peculiarity of the Norwegian situation is that individuals outside the *Storting* may also make legislative proposals. In order for a proposal of this kind to be taken up, it must be adopted by a member of parliament but this does not have to mean that the member supports the proposal’s contents. Proposals made by individual members in the *Folketing* and the *Storting* do not always come to a vote. What often happens in Denmark is that motions of this kind get “shelved”, i.e. they are put aside once they have been through the committee stage. In Sweden committees also have the right to initiate legislation within their area of competence. This right is only enjoyed in Finland by the finance and banking committees and only in relation to a number of specific matters. Åland’s *Lagting* has the right to put legislative proposals to the Finnish parliament on issues concerning the administration of the province.

Preparation and Debate

Once a Bill has had its first reading in parliament, in theory it could immediately be debated and made law. None of the Nordic countries, however, make use of this kind of short cut, instead the course of the legislative process follows a rather complicated pattern of discussion in committee, a number of readings, and referrals. The aim is to counteract any tendency to make decisions that are too precipitate and to provide space for reflection and detailed consideration. In the older type of bicameral system, it was in the nature of things that a Bill would be made the subject of a twofold debate and passage through committee. None of the Nordic countries has a strictly bicameral system any longer but for legislative purposes the *Storting* is divided into two chambers: the *Odelsting* and the *Lagting*. When Finland moved in 1906 from the ancient Diet of the Four Estates to a single chamber parliament, a rudimentary upper chamber was introduced as a compromise measure; this is known as the Grand Committee and consists of 45 members. Subsequently its political importance diminished and nowadays it serves mostly as the body responsible for checking the technical and linguistic details of new Bills.

When a Bill is moved in the Danish *Folketing*, this is followed by a debate on the general principles involved. Subsequent debate in committee is not essential, but usually takes place. In the course of its second reading, the debate on the Bill revolves around matters of detail and any changes or amendments are put to the vote. A final vote is taken after a third reading of the Bill which takes place after a second passage through committee should this occur. At this stage one third of the members of the *Folketing* can demand that the Bill be made subject to a popular referendum. Once the Bill has been accepted, it gets final ratification from the sovereign and is promulgated.

The procedure in Finland is that any Bill, whether one moved by the Government or not, is debated in committee. The verdict of the committee forms the basis for its first reading before the full session of parliament when the Bill is debated in general terms. The Bill is then sent to the Grand Committee, and their report starts the second reading. This is when the Bill is gone through in detail. If any amendments are proposed the Bill is sent back to the Grand Committee, after which the second reading continues. A final vote is taken after the third reading when parliament either approves or rejects the measure in its entirety. The procedures of the *Lagting* in Åland coincide to a large degree with those operating in the Finnish parliament.

A Bill in Finland does not however become law until it has been signed by the president and countersigned by the minister responsible. On a number of occasions the president has refused to ratify a decision of parliament. The Finnish parliament does, however, have a way of overriding the president's veto, should they decide to vote on the matter once more and arrive at the same decision. The president's veto is suspensive, its primary purpose is to delay.

The procedures of the Finnish parliament also contain a large measure of protection for minorities. With the exception of certain kinds of law, a third of the members can call for a postponement of the third reading. This often means that a Bill has to be passed by a two-thirds majority if it is to be enacted without delay. Another peculiarity of Finnish legislative procedures is that laws other than constitutional laws are sometimes voted on using the procedures expressly laid down for amendments to the constitution.

In Norway Bills are always moved in the *Odelsting* which sends them without debate to the appropriate committee for discussion. This is followed by a more detailed debate in the *Odelsting* and then, if approved, they are sent to the *Lagting*. If the *Lagting* makes any amendments, the Bill goes back to the *Odelsting*. For a Bill to be approved it must win approval in both chambers. Since seats are allocated on a proportional basis, the political majorities in both chambers are usually the same. In the unusual event that the *Odelsting* and the *Lagting* vote differently, the constitution requires that the issue be decided by a joint meeting of both chambers in the *Storting*. The Bill then requires the support of two thirds of those voting to be passed. Formally the sovereign's assent is then required and finally the Bill is published. In theory the sovereign's right of veto, which has not been used since 1905, can be overridden by the *Storting* passing the same Bill unchanged on two separate occasions with an intervening election.

Until recently legislative procedures in Iceland were very similar to those in Norway. The division of the *Althing* into two sections has now been abolished. The president's assent is required for a Bill to become law. Should the president refuse to sign, the law stays in force until the matter is decided by a popular referendum. The *Althing* enjoys a certain degree of influence over the Government's affairs since it can order a specific Bill to be drafted and can set up committees of inquiry to look into particular areas of concern.

In Sweden all proposed Bills and motions have to be dealt with in

committee. A third of the members of a committee can demand that the Council of Legislation (*Lagrådet*) expresses its opinion on a Bill's legality. The Council of Legislation is composed of high-ranking jurists, it can also look at proposed legislation from a legal standpoint at the Government's request. In general a Bill is only subject to a single debate in the full chamber, in which matters of principle are looked at together with questions of detail. The decision of parliament is final; the Government has no veto.

Constitutional Amendments

The regulations governing the establishment and amendment of constitutional laws differ from general legislative procedures. As the constitution defines the basic legal norms of a country and lays down the fundamental rules of the democratic process, the constitution has been provided with special forms of protection. In Sweden these rules mean that proposed amendments to the constitution must be passed by two successive parliaments with an election intervening. According to the terms of a statute that has never been used, a minority of the members of parliament can demand that the proposed amendment be the subject of a special referendum in conjunction with a general election; if the referendum results in a majority against the proposal, this result is binding. Iceland also uses this method of a second vote after an intervening election; general elections have to be called immediately after the first occasion on which the amendment is passed. Amendments to the Norwegian constitution have to be first moved and then remain dormant until after a subsequent election. Finally, in order for the amendment to be passed, it requires a two-thirds majority of the *Storting* with at least two thirds of the members present. Since 1814 approximately two thirds of the 112 paragraphs of the constitution have been subject to greater or lesser revisions.

The most complicated procedure for making constitutional amendments exists in Denmark. The Government has to support the amendment and the *Folketing* pass it by a simple majority. This is followed by the calling of a general election and the new *Folketing* has to approve the Bill in its turn. Within six months a special referendum must be held in which a majority of the voters must approve the amendment, this majority must be equal to 40 per cent of the total number of registered elec-

tors. Since the constitution of 1953 came into effect, no changes to it have been made.

The main requirement for changes to the Finnish constitution is for two votes approving the amendment by successive parliaments with an intervening election. While the first vote need only be passed with a simple majority, the second must be supported by two thirds of the voting members. There is, however, an exception clause which means that Finland is the only Nordic country in which a constitutional amendment can be made without an intervening general election. If five sixths of the voting members declare the amendment to be urgent, it can be immediately passed by a two-thirds majority of parliament. Another feature peculiar to Finland is the existence of what are known as emergency laws. This kind of law contains statutes that conflict with the constitution, usually because they infringe the right to own property. Instead of changing the constitution, parliament adopts laws of this kind by the same rules that govern amendments to the constitution; in practice this usually involves making use of the “urgency” provision. A significant amount of financial legislation has been passed in this manner.

The Power of Appropriation

Parliament’s power over the revenues and expenditure of the state has a long history. It was the combination of gaining the right to assent to the levying of new taxes with the right to present petitions that subsequently resulted in parliament acquiring part of its legislative powers. The basic principle remains that the power of taxation lies with the people’s elected representatives. The Government does not have the right to levy new taxes on its own authority; the rules provide that decisions on taxation can only be made in the form of legislation. The regulations governing taxation laws differ in a number of respects from general legislative procedures. In Norway and Iceland, decisions on matters of taxation are made by the plenary sessions of the *Storting* and the *Althing*, and not by the division of the parliaments into two sections. The Finnish constitution requires that taxation proposals intended to be in force for more than one year be passed by a two-thirds majority.

Technically speaking parliament also has the deciding say on matters relating to the state’s expenditure. In practice it is the Government that

dominates budget proceedings; this occurs both as a matter of principle and for practical reasons. The budget presents an overall picture of the revenues and expenditure of the state, makes clear the priorities of the activities of the state, and provides a means of assessing their consequences for the country's economy. The budget is therefore considered to be an important instrument of government for the realisation of its policies, for redistributing resources in order to promote its various goals, and for influencing social change. One practical reason why the Government is responsible for the shaping of the budget is that it is only the various ministries and the central administrative agencies that have the resources to take stock of every single item of expenditure. The budget process follows the same basic pattern in all the Nordic countries. The various branches of the administration send in their estimated accounts and assessments before the start of each financial year. The budgetary year is the same as the calendar year, except in Sweden where it starts on 1 July. The various ministries compile lists of their requirements and assign priorities to them. It is the finance ministry that plays the most important role at this point; it has to make sure that the total expenditure can be contained within the limits set by the Government.

Parliamentary debate on the budget is usually split into a general discussion and one in which individual items of expenditure are debated. The general debate usually turns into a discussion of the Government's overall policies, in the course of which the opposition gets a chance to put forward alternative proposals.

In comparison with the other Nordic countries, the Swedish parliament's handling of its budget is a fairly protracted process: the large number of consequential motions made by members of parliament take up a lot of time. In the other Nordic countries, there are greater limitations on the rights of members to initiate motions in relation to the budget. The Economic Affairs Committee of the Swedish parliament is, moreover, in a weaker position than its Nordic counterparts.

Changes to the management of public finances in the Nordic countries have been very much in line with the trend in other Western European countries. After several decades of great expansion, the public sector has been subject to cuts, savings and rationalisation. The age of the great reforms is over. Decentralisation has replaced central planning. Budget policy is now aimed at defining the general financial framework, while it is left up to local units, primarily municipal authorities, to put policy into effect. The management of government finances is being

altered with the aim of increasing productivity, clarifying accounting methods and encouraging efficient resource-management.

The Power of Scrutiny

In accordance with the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people, it is parliament that is entrusted with the power to check that the activities of the state are carried out in line with the will of the people. Two of the means at its disposal have already been mentioned: power over legislation and control of the public purse. In the parliamentary form of government, various methods exist to ensure the fundamental character of the political agreement between Government and parliament; these will be looked at more in detail in the next chapter. A further option available to members of parliament in scrutinising the workings of government is to call responsible ministers to account at a "Question Time" modelled on the British House of Commons. A distinction is drawn between two different types of questions in all the Nordic countries. The simpler kind are short questions, to be responded to within a week or thereabouts, and result in a fairly brief discussion between the questioner and the government representative. The other sort, the interpellation, concerns a subject of greater political significance, it involves a detailed argument and leads to a more wide-ranging debate. In Finland the institution of the interpellation is used as a means to call ministers to account and may end in a motion of no confidence which may in turn cause the Government to fall. In order for an interpellation to be instituted, it must be supported by at least 20 members of the Finnish parliament.

A study of Norwegian petroleum policy revealed that the *Storting* had played a far from decisive role in the choice of how oil resources were to be exploited. And yet parliamentary question times had not been totally without effect. It may be possible to see them as a side-show, or a safety valve, which has served as a supplement and corrective to the more specialised and secretive decision-making fora (Blichner & Olsen 1986). The Swedish parliament has made various attempts to strengthen the role played by parliamentary question times in political debate.

Foreign Policy

The area of policy where the power of parliament has traditionally been considered weakest is that of foreign affairs, which was long seen as the prerogative of the ruler or head of state. Although elected representatives might indirectly affect the external policies of a country by refusing to levy new taxes to finance military campaigns, their influence on decisions relating to the great foreign affairs issues was slight. There have been arguments advanced that even the parliaments of democratic states should play a restricted role in foreign policy. The course of international events often makes swift decisions necessary, diplomacy requires a certain degree of secrecy, and a country may need to present the appearance of unity to the outside world. Nowadays the most usual forms of parliamentary scrutiny of foreign affairs policy are *ex ante* directives, *ex post* scrutiny, and the right to ratify treaties. The general trend has been for the difference between the conduct of foreign and home affairs policies to diminish. In Denmark parliament currently has scarcely less power over foreign policy than it does over domestic affairs. The Finnish constitution states that "The president decides on Finland's relations to foreign powers", while reserving for parliament the right to approve treaties on matters that fall within the purview of parliament. Parliament must also give its assent to any declaration of peace or war. According to parliamentary rules, the Foreign Affairs Committee must be kept informed by the Government and therefore serves as an intermediary between parliament and President/Government. The members of the Foreign Affairs Committee have a duty of confidentiality.

The other Nordic countries also have rules requiring the assent of parliament for the conclusion of treaties with foreign powers. In formal terms it is the head of state in Norway, Denmark, and Iceland who is responsible for the day to day running of foreign policy, but in contrast with Finland, in reality it is the Government that has the real power in this area. The pivotal role of the Finnish head of state in foreign affairs during and after the Second World War is unique among the Nordic countries. However, it is the Foreign Affairs Ministry in Finland that deals with the management and implementation of foreign policy, under the direction of the Foreign Minister.

In Finland and Iceland, it is the foreign affairs committees of their parliaments that mediate between members of parliament and the Government; the parliaments of Sweden and Denmark have a special foreign affairs council for this function, and in Norway this is carried out by an

enlarged foreign affairs and constitutional committee. It is within these committees that the governments provide information about major foreign affairs issues. Their sessions are secret and they are only entitled to play an advisory role.

When Denmark acceded to the European Community, the *Folketing's* Market Affairs Committee (*Markedsutvalget*) gained great importance. The Bill approving Denmark's accession to the European Community, contained a clause stipulating that the Government must keep the *Folketing*, in effect – the Market Affairs Committee – informed about all Community decisions affecting Denmark. This provision soon led to conflict between Government and parliament. The Government was forced to accept that it had always to make sure that its negotiating positions at the meetings of the European Council of Ministers were not in conflict with the will of the majority of members of parliament. This procedure amounts to an embodiment of the principle of negative parliamentarism; the Government's negotiating positions are valid only so long as a majority of the members of the Market Affairs Committee do not vote against them. In this regard, the *Folketing* has gained for itself a greater degree of power than the parliament of any other Community member state.

Parliamentary Control of the Executive

The control of public administration involves parliament having the right to scrutinise the accounts and management of the state's resources. The parliaments of all the Nordic countries appoint their own auditors who are entitled to examine the entire apparatus of public administration.

Every year the Constitutional Committee of the Swedish parliament produces its inspection report, which deals primarily with the Government's handling of its affairs. Since 1988 the Constitutional Committee has been able, as have other committees, to conduct public hearings. Its Norwegian counterpart, the Scrutiny Committee, was set up in 1981 to scrutinise government records and matters relating to the national audit.

Ever since 1809, the Swedish parliament has appointed a parliamentary commissioner for justice or "Ombudsman" whose duties are to examine at his own initiative, or on behalf of members of the general public, the affects of laws and other regulations once implemented. Investi-

gation of public officials and judges can lead to various degrees of criticism and in the most serious cases to prosecution. The Ombudsman makes a report every year to parliament. The Swedish institution of the Ombudsman has been adopted by a number of other countries. It was adopted in the Finnish constitution of 1919 and introduced in Denmark in 1953, in Norway in 1962, and in Iceland in 1987. Although the Ombudsman is appointed by parliament, this should not be taken to mean that his functions can be considered to be part of parliament's power of scrutiny. The Ombudsman is meant to work independently and is supposed to provide individual citizens with the opportunity to lodge complaints against the administration when all other judicial avenues have been exhausted.

The Status of Parliament

The decline of parliament is an idea often referred to, even in the Nordic countries. The various Nordic parliaments are often seen as little more than a "rubber-stamp". Research into parliamentary working practices has, however, revealed a quite different picture (Damgaard 1992).

There is no disputing that there has been an increasing level of parliamentary activity during the eighties. In Denmark this increase can be observed in various aspects of the workings of both the plenary sessions and the committees. In Norway there has been an increase in the number of issues dealt with in committee and in the minority reports the committees produce. The Swedish parliament has witnessed a rise in the number of motions and questions put forward. Finland has seen an increase in the number of Bills and announcements from the Government's side and in the number of motions and questions put by parliament.

How should we interpret this rising level of parliamentary activity? Is it the result of increasing conflict and competition between the parties? Research has made it quite clear that the level of conflict has in fact risen in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. However, the pattern is different in Finland where parliament has been more consensus-seeking.

Changes to the working practices of the *Folketing* have been largely determined by changes to the Danish party system. The new party set-up that came into being after the protest vote in the election of 1973 had immediate consequences for the way parliament worked. The party sys-

tem has become more fragmented and unstable. The changes have involved a reinforcing of the “conflict-creating structures”.

Informal Networks

The clear lines of demarcation drawn by the constitution between various public institutions are constantly being bridged in reality by informal contacts between individuals. In accordance with the doctrine of the separation of powers, the legislative and executive powers form different branches of government. Parliamentary democracy requires that the parliamentary majority determine the formation of government while the minority constitute the opposition. In reality there is a well-developed network of links between both sides. Members of parliament, both in Government and in opposition, are in close touch with the administration, for example. Contacts of this kind take place within the parliamentary committees in particular. Specialisation by sector has led to an integration of power. Access to information and involvement in negotiation have opened up new opportunities for exerting influence outside formal channels.

Parliamentary Government

The significance of the role played by parliament in political life depends on its relation to other centres of power. In a representative system, parliament's position is determined primarily by its relation to the executive power. The fundamental problem of a parliamentary system, the relation between parliament and government, is dealt with in the following chapter.

5

The Executive

There are two main forms of the relationship between the legislative and executive powers among the Western democracies. The parliamentary systems are built on a monistic principle: the Government is politically dependent on parliament. Presidential systems are based on a dualistic concept of the separation of powers: the executive and the legislative powers constitute separate branches of government. Two of the Nordic countries require extra attention in this respect. The Icelandic and Finnish forms of government combine features of both the parliamentary and the presidential systems.

Presidential Power

According to the letter of the constitution, the president of Iceland has considerable power. In formal terms executive power is vested in the president. The president also has the right to appoint and dismiss public officials, to dissolve the *Althing* and has the right to veto legislation – a suspensive veto only. But in practice there is little scope for the exercise of personal power by the president. In real terms executive power lies with the Government which is answerable to parliament. Although the president puts the formal signature to government decisions, it is the minister who countersigns them who bears the political responsibility. The duties of the head of state are primarily ceremonial and the role of the Icelandic president is comparable with the monarchs of the Scandinavian countries. There are historical reasons for this. By the time Ice-

land gained its independence in 1944, the country had already been developing a parliamentary system for over a quarter of a century, in which the Danish sovereign was the head of state but in which real power was exercised by Icelandic ministers.

The Finnish system of government contains a distinctive mixture of parliamentary democracy and presidential government. The principles of parliamentary democracy are enshrined in the constitution, which states that ministers of state must "enjoy the confidence of parliament" and that they are answerable to parliament for their actions in office. Parliament can, for example, in the course of an interpellation debate declare that it has no confidence in the Government or a particular minister. Equally the president has his own independent sphere of authority. The president is responsible for foreign policy, appoints the most senior public officials, has the right to issue decrees on the implementation of legislation and on the organisation of the administration, has certain rights to grant pardons, has a suspensive veto in legislation matters as well as the power to delay decisions. The president still has the power to dissolve parliament, and to call new elections, but now only with the consent of the prime minister. A further diminution of the president's powers is envisaged in the constitutional debate currently taking place. This would include limitations on the president's power of appointment and the abolition of the president's right of veto.

During the inter-war period Finnish presidents of various degrees of strength or weakness succeeded one another, but after the Second World War the political authority of the office of president was gradually to increase. Foreign relations were among the most important reasons for this. Since the president had become a guarantor for the stability of the country's foreign affairs, the office of the president came at times to exert increasing influence in the domestic policy sphere, this was particularly true during Urho Kekkonen's period in office between 1956 and 1981. The lack of stable majority governments, moreover, had previously hampered the development of governments strong enough to compete with the power of the president.

This state of affairs was changed to some extent during Mauno Koivisto's tenure of office. Koivisto's declared intention was to reduce the influence of the president on the running of day to day government affairs. However, in comparative terms the role played by the Finnish president is still a powerful one.

Together with a number of other European countries, Finland and

Iceland make up a group of states which mix parliamentary democracy with presidential government. This kind of political system is sometimes referred to as “semi-presidential”. While the Icelandic president in practice is in a weak position, the power of the Finnish president is comparable to the French president. Each of these countries has arrived at its own particular combination of both principles. The letter of the constitution does not always coincide with the actual structures of government. The laws framing the written constitution can be interpreted in a number of ways such that the power of the president can be reinforced or diminished in relation to parliament and the Government.

The Parliamentary System

In a parliamentary system the Government must have the confidence of parliament. A narrow interpretation of the term would mean that the parliamentary majority must demonstrate its declared support for the Government at any given moment. This variant, usually referred to as positive parliamentarism, would mean that only majority governments could be considered parliamentarian. But the definition of parliamentarism accepted in the Nordic countries is a wider one and allows scope for the alternative interpretation known as negative parliamentarism: the Government may remain in office provided parliament does not expressly declare that the Government lacks the support of parliament for its policies.

Rules for the Formation of Governments

The rules laid down in the constitution for determining how governments are brought into being are generally fairly terse. Sweden constitutes an exception in this regard as the 1974 constitution is unusually detailed on this matter. The Swedish procedure, whereby parliament has to approve in advance the appointment of a new Prime Minister by a special vote, is reminiscent of positive parliamentarism. However, the rules for the voting procedure, which mean that members who abstain or who are absent are deemed to give their passive support to the proposed Prime Minister, also make it possible for minority governments to

be formed. An obvious example is provided by the formation of the 1978 Government, when Ola Ullsten was appointed Prime Minister. Only the 39 Liberals voted in favour, but as the Social Democrats and the members of the Centre Party abstained from voting, the 66 no-votes of the Conservatives and the Communists were not sufficient to form the absolute majority of no-votes needed to prevent the appointment of the prime ministerial candidate proposed by the Speaker.

Denmark and Norway still implement the system which used to apply in Sweden prior to its new constitution. As part of this procedure it is the head of state who is formally responsible for the formation of the Government: "the king appoints and dismisses the Prime Minister and other ministers" (the Danish constitution); "the king alone selects a council of eligible Norwegian citizens" (Norwegian constitution). But in practice the scope for a personal use of power by the sovereign is, just as in Britain, almost non-existent. Once the parties have agreed that a party or combination of parties is to form the Government, the role of the monarch is limited to giving formal assent. There have been several occasions, particularly when the parliamentary situation has been unclear, when negotiations on the formation of the Government have been lead by a specially appointed *formateur*; in 1975 this role fell to the Speaker of the *Folketing*. A similar procedure was adopted for the formation of the Norwegian Government in 1990.

The situation in Iceland is in practice the same as in Denmark and Norway. The Government is formally appointed by the president, but it is the parliamentary situation and negotiations between the parties that actually determine the make-up of the Government. On a number of occasions, the options open to the Icelandic President have been of some significance, in the choice of *formateur*, for example, or the measures chosen to put pressure on those negotiating to form the Government.

In Finland it is the head of state who is formally responsible for the appointment of the Government, with the proviso that the Government must enjoy the confidence of parliament. The political realities of the Finnish set-up are more closely tied to the letter of the constitution than in Denmark, Norway and Iceland. The Finnish president has often had a decisive impact on the formation of the Government. Circumstances, however, are changing; Finland is becoming more like the other Nordic countries in this regard. According to a proposal the Finnish constitution would be changed so as to transfer the power to appoint the prime minister from the president to parliament.

Parliamentary Confidence

The most significant form for the implementation of the principle of parliamentary government lies in the power of parliament to force the Government to resign. The Government itself may raise the question of to what extent it enjoys the confidence of parliament. This usually takes place as part of a government initiative of political significance on a legislative or budgetary issue. The Government demands a vote of confidence: it declares in advance of the debate that if defeated it will resign, which means that the position adopted by parliament in relation to the issue under discussion will decide the continued existence of the Government. Parliament itself may also move a motion of this kind. A motion of no confidence can be aimed at a particular minister or at the Government as a whole; in Sweden a motion of no confidence formally aimed at the Prime Minister is in practice considered to be aimed at the Government as a whole.

Parliament thus disposes of an effective instrument of political control over the Government. But the government is not without counter-measures of its own. With the exception of Norway, all the Nordic governments are in a position to respond to a vote of no confidence by dissolving parliament and calling a general election. This rule is a legacy from the time when the monarch had the right to recall and dissolve parliament. According to the letter of the Danish constitution this power to dissolve parliament is still vested in the monarch, while in Sweden it has passed to the Government in formal terms as well. In Iceland it is the president who dissolves the *Althing*, but in practice the assent of the Government is always required.

In none of the Nordic countries does parliament have the right to dissolve itself. Norway has therefore no means of calling new elections. In Sweden the use of this weapon of a new election is made more difficult both by the short periods between elections and because the subsequent election will take place as scheduled, even though an election has been called in the interim. It is in Denmark and Iceland that the right to dissolve parliament has been used most frequently. The *Folketing* has seldom sat for the whole of its four-year term. Until now the Finnish president has always had the option of dissolving parliament and calling new elections. This option has reinforced the power of the presidential office. The constitution is, however, in the process of being changed. In future it will be possible for the Finnish parliament to be dissolved by a motion initiated by the Prime Minister. The president will then arrive at a final

decision, having heard the views of the Speaker and the parliamentary party groups. Although the president will retain his veto, the extent of his influence will have been restricted and that of the Prime Minister strengthened in comparison with the situation that obtained previously. Changes to the constitution will also mean that parliament must approve in advance the program of any incoming government. This will introduce an element of positive parliamentarism.

The Composition of Governments

So much for the formal rules governing the accession and resignation of governments. But how have these worked out in practice?

In a multi-party system based on proportional representation, it is the exception rather than the rule that a single party wins a majority. Since the advent of parliamentary democracy, this has only ever occurred in Norway and Sweden. The Labour Party had an absolute majority in the *Storting* from 1945 to 1961, and the Social Democrats had a majority of the seats in the second chamber of the *Riksdag* from 1941 to 1944 and from 1969 to 1970. The normal pattern in the Nordic parliamentary democracies is one of minority and coalition governments.

The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy...

By the end of the First World War, political systems in Europe had gone through a profound transformation. The principles of universal suffrage and parliamentary democracy had triumphed after years of struggle and conflict. Great hopes were raised by the birth of a new era. But the new constitutional arrangements were unable to meet all expectations. Governments formed on the basis of parliamentary support were usually short-lived, unstable, and incapable of solving the major economic and social problems. In many Continental countries democratic institutions collapsed and were replaced by dictatorships. Was parliamentary democracy, the century's greatest constitutional experiment, in danger of failing?

The development of parliamentary democracy in the Nordic countries in the 1920s differed little from the rest of Europe. No single party gained a majority of its own and one government crisis followed another.

Table 5.1 The Composition of the Nordic Governments**Denmark**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party</i>						
1945	Kristensen, K.							L
1947	Hedtoft, H.	SD						
1950	Eriksen, E.				L			C
1953	Hedtoft, H.	SD						
1955	Hansen, H.C.	SD						
1957	Hansen, H.C.	SD	SL					LJ
1960	Kampmann, V.	SD	SL					LJ
1960	Kampmann, V.	SD	SL					
1962	Krag, J.O.	SD	SL					
1964	Krag, J.O.	SD						
1968	Baunsgaard, H.		SL	L				C
1971	Krag, J.O.	SD						
1972	Jørgensen, A.	SD						
1973	Hartling, P.			L				
1975	Jørgensen, A.	SD						
1978	Jørgensen, A.	SD		L				
1979	Jørgensen, A.	SD						
1982	Schlüter, P.			L	ChP	CD		C
1988	Schlüter, P.		SL	L				C
1990	Schlüter, P.			L				C
1993	Rasmussen, P. Nyrup	SD	SL		ChP	CD		

SD: Social Democrats. SL: Social Liberals. L: Liberals. ChP: Christian People's Party. CD: Centre Democrats. C: Conservatives. LJ: Legal Justice

NB: Prime Minister's party in bold type

er. Sweden had seven different governments between 1920 and 1930, Norway eight, and Finland no less than thirteen. The change from this shaky start to a form of parliamentary democracy that could function with greater stability took a rather different course in all five countries.

It was in Denmark that the Social Democrats first took on the mantle of government in a more lasting fashion. Although the party had no majority of its own, in collaboration with the Social Liberals, Thorvald Stauning was able to form a Government that was to remain in office throughout the 1930s. On several occasions during the 1920s the Swedish Social Democrats formed governments but were forced out of office

Finland

Year	Prime Minister	Party						
1945	Paasikivi, J.K.	DLPF	SD	Cen	SP	L		
1946	Pekkala, M.	DLPF	SD	Cen	SP			
1948	Fagerholm, K.A.		SD					
1950	Kekkonen, U.K.			Cen	SP	L		
1951	Kekkonen, U.K.		SD	Cen	SP	L		
1951	Kekkonen, U.K.		SD	Cen	SP			
1953	Kekkonen, U.K.			Cen	SP			
1953	Toumioja, S.							
1954	Törngren, R.			Cen	SP	L	C	
1954	Kekkonen, U.K.		SD	Cen				
1956	Fagerholm, K.A.		SD	Cen	SP	L		
1957	Sukselainen, V.J.			Cen	SP	L		
1957	Sukselainen, V.J.			Cen		L		
1957	von Fieandt, R.							
1958	Kuuskoski, R.							
1958	Fagerholm, K.A.		SD	Cen	SP	L	C	
1958	Sukselainen, V.J.			Cen				
1961	Miettunen, M.			Cen				
1962	Karjalainen, A.			Cen	SP	L	C	
1963	Lehto, R.							
1964	Virolainen, J.			Cen	SP	L	C	
1966	Paasio, R.	DLPF	SD	Cen				
1968	Koivisto, M.	DLPF	SD	Cen	SP			
1970	Aura, T.							
1970	Karjalainen, A.	DLPF	SD	Cen	SP	L		
1971	Karjalainen, A.		SD	Cen	SP	L		
1971	Aura, T.							
1972	Paasio, R.		SD					
1972	Sorsa, K.		SD	Cen	SP	L		
1975	Liinamaa, K.							
1975	Miettunen, M.	DLPF	SD	Cen	SP	L		
1976	Miettunen, M.			Cen	SP	L		
1977	Sorsa, K.	DLPF	SD	Cen	SP	L		
1978	Sorsa, K.	DLPF	SD	Cen		L		
1979	Koivisto, M.	DLPF	SD	Cen	SP			
1982	Sorsa, K.	DLPF	SD	Cen	SP			
1982	Sorsa, K.		SD	Cen	SP			
1983	Sorsa, K.		SD	Cen	SP			FR
1987	Holkeri, H.		SD		SP		C	FR
1990	Holkeri, H.		SD		SP		C	
1991	Aho, E.			Cen	SP		C	CL

DLPF: Democratic League of the People of Finland. SD: Social Democrats. Cen: Centre Party/Agrarian League. SP: Swedish People's Party. L: Liberals. C: Conservatives (Coalition Party). CL: Christian League of Finland. FR: Finnish Rural Party

Iceland

<i>Year</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party</i>				
1944	Ólafur Thors	PA	SD			Ind
1947	Stefán Stefánsson		SD	PP		Ind
1949	Ólafur Thors					Ind
1950	Steingrímur Steinhórssón			PP		Ind
1953	Ólafur Thors			PP		Ind
1956	Hermann Jónasson	PA	SD	PP		Ind
1958	Emil Jónsson		SD			
1959	Ólafur Thors		SD			Ind
1963	Bjarni Benediktsson		SD			Ind
1970	Jóhann Hafstein		SD			Ind
1971	Ólafur Jóhannesson	PA		PP		
1974	Geir Hallgrímsson			PP		Ind
1978	Ólafur Jóhannesson	PA	SD	PP		
1979	Benedikt Gröndal		SD			
1980	Gunnar Thoroddsen	PA		PP		Ind
1983	Steingrímur Hermannsson			PP		Ind
1987	Thorsteinn Pálsson		SD	PP		Ind
1988	Steingrímur Hermannsson	PA	SD	PP		CP
1991	David Oddsson		SD			Ind

PA: People's Alliance. SD: Social Democrats. PP: Progressive Party. Ind: Independence Party. CP: Citizen's Party

Norway

<i>Year</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party</i>				
1945	Gerhardsen, E.	Lab				
1951	Torp, O.	Lab				
1955	Gerhardsen, E.	Lab				
1963	Lyng, J.		L	Cen	CD	C
1963	Gerhardsen, E.	Lab				
1965	Borten, P.		L	Cen	CD	C
1971	Bratteli, T.	Lab				
1972	Korvald, L.		L	Cen	CD	
1973	Bratteli, T.	Lab				
1976	Nordli, O.	Lab				
1981	Brundtland, G. Harlem	Lab				
1981	Willoch, K.					C
1983	Willoch, K.			Cen	CD	C
1986	Brundtland, G. Harlem	Lab				
1989	Syse, J.P.			Cen	CD	C
1990	Brundtland, G. Harlem	Lab				

Lab: Labour Party. L: Liberals. Cen: Centre Party. CD: Christian Democrats. C: Conservatives

Sweden

Year	Prime Minister	Party				
1945	Hansson, P.A.	SD				
1945	Erlander, T.	SD				
1951	Erlander, T.	SD	Cen			
1957	Erlander, T.	SD				
1969	Palme, O.	SD				
1976	Fälldin, T.		Cen	L	C	
1978	Ullsten, O.			L		
1979	Fälldin, T.		Cen	L	C	
1981	Fälldin, T.		Cen	L		
1982	Palme, O.	SD				
1986	Carlsson, I.	SD				
1991	Bildt, C.		Cen	L	C	CD

SD: Social Democrats. Cen: Centre Party. L: Liberals. C: Conservatives. CD: Christian Democrats.

after a year or two for lack of support from other parties. The Norwegian Labour Party's reluctance to enter government lasted for many years. An attempt to form a government in 1928 lasted no longer than 18 days and intensified the party's suspicions about "ministerial socialism".

... and its Triumph

The crisis of parliamentary democracy was resolved in similar fashion in Denmark, Norway and Sweden during the 1930s. In order to gain support for its economic policies aimed at abolishing large-scale unemployment, the Social Democrats made pacts with the Farmers' parties which entailed a number of concessions for the agricultural sector. Known as the *Kanslergadeforliget* in Denmark and *kohandeln* (horse-trading) in Sweden, agreements of this kind were made in both countries in 1933. In Norway Johan Nygaardsvold was able to form a Labour government in 1935 as a result of a similar deal with the Farmers' Party. Iceland too had no single party with a majority and the country was governed for most of the 1920s by a non-Socialist coalition. However, during the 1930s a "Red-Green" coalition was also formed in Iceland: the Social

Democrats and the Progressive Party were partners in government between 1934 and 1938.

The importance of the "historic compromise" of the 1930s between workers and farmers can scarcely be over-estimated. Minority governments were replaced by governments which could rely on a majority in parliament and were therefore able to push through policies with longer-term goals. This laid the foundations for the development of the modern welfare state. Pacts of this kind had indirect consequences for the system of political parties as well. In his dissertation, Ulf Lindström (1985) has sought to explain why Denmark, Norway and Sweden, in contrast with many other European countries, were not to witness the rise of significant Fascist and Nazi parties. Economic and social differences were not on such a scale as to provide an adequate explanation. Instead it seems that it was the political circumstances that were the deciding factor. The pacts made during the years of crisis proved that parliamentary institutions were capable of overcoming economic and social problems. The behaviour of the established parties helped to ensure that Scandinavian fascism was never more than an extremely marginal and transient phenomenon.

Events took a different course in Finland. The Civil War of 1918 left great wounds and created enormous suspicion between Left and Right. With the exception of a short-lived Social Democratic minority government in 1926, it would be another two decades before the Left entered government. Non-Socialist minority governments succeeded one another throughout the 1920s. A number of non-Socialist majority coalitions were formed in the 1930s. Democratic government was threatened at this time both by Communists working underground and by powerful anti-parliamentary tendencies on the far right, such as the Lappon Movement, the Popular Homeland Movement (IKL), and the extremist nationalists of the Academic Carelian Society. A turning-point came in 1932 with what is known as the Mäntsälä Rebellion. Armed adherents of the Lappos together with right-wing militias prevented a Social Democratic member of parliament from speaking at a meeting, disorder spread, and those gathered for the meeting demanded the resignation of the legally elected member. Not until the President in a radio broadcast asked the rebels to lay down their arms did the danger diminish. Government policy continued to be oriented towards the right-wing for several more years. An opening in the coalition process occurred in 1937 when the Social Democrats and the Agrarians formed a coalition,

known as the "Red-Soil" coalition. At long last Finland had its own Red-Green coalition. But the development of this new political direction was interrupted by the outbreak of war.

The Second World War brought with it extraordinary political circumstances for all the Nordic countries. Sweden, the only Nordic country to remain outside the theatre of war, was ruled by a national coalition government. Norway's legitimate government was in exile in London. The Danish national coalition government was forced into making concessions to the Germans. Iceland, occupied by British troops, was ruled for a time by a government of civil servants. Finland was governed by a rapid succession of regimes in which most parties were represented, with the exception of the Communists who continued to be prohibited. For a brief transitional period immediately after the Second World War, Norway, Denmark and Finland were governed by national coalition governments.

Finland

Although the war years introduced a different set of political circumstances to all the Nordic countries, the changes were most far-reaching in Finland. The country did not just find itself in a totally new situation with regard to foreign affairs as a result of its armistice with the Soviet Union in 1944 and the Finnish-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Security, and Mutual Assistance of 1948, but the relative political strengths of its parties were turned upside-down. One of the Soviets' demands in the peace negotiations was that "organisations of a Fascist nature" should be prohibited. In addition the Communists were to be legalised. The Popular Democrats won 23.5 per cent of the votes at the first election held after the war. The three largest parties (the Social Democrats, the Agrarians, and the Communists) formed a Government with the support of the minor parties of the centre. Communist participation in government ceased in 1948 after electoral defeat and rumours that the Communists were preparing to mount a coup. Various government combinations followed but during the years from 1951 to 1957, the government was largely determined by collaboration between the Social Democrats and the Agrarians, taking up once again the tradition of 1937. The parliamentary crisis of 1958 was caused partly by a split among the Social Democrats, and partly by the refusal of the Agrarians

for reasons of foreign policy to work together with the Social Democratic majority. With the exception of a small number of caretaker governments, the Agrarians (later the Centre party) formed part of almost every government and were frequently over-represented in proportion to their size as a parliamentary party.

For many years governments in Finland were very short-lived. Collaboration between the Social Democrats and the Centre Party was often troubled by conflicts between the interests of consumers and producers. Political fragmentation in parliament contributed to the absence of stable majorities.

But the long list of Finnish governments can present an exaggerated image of turbulence. The incoming government was often only marginally different from its predecessor. During the years from 1966 to 1987, most governments were formed around a coalition of the Centre Party, the Social Democrats, the Popular Democrats, and parties of the centre, while the Conservatives (Coalition Party) were deemed "unfit to govern". The government formed after the election of 1983 meant a change in direction to the extent that the Popular Democrats were not included, and that the proportion of ministerial posts awarded to the Centre Party no longer exceeded the party's parliamentary strength, and that the victors of the election, the Rural Party, entered government for the first time.

The election of 1987 led to two major changes. The Centre Party left the Government. After more than two decades in opposition, the Conservatives not only entered Government but were also awarded the post of Prime Minister. The keystone of the Government was a partnership of the Social Democrats and the Conservatives, with the Swedish People's Party and the Rural Party also forming part of the ruling coalition; the latter left the Government, however, in 1990. The revolutionary change to the pattern of government in 1987 did not alter in any fundamental way the practice that the Government is composed of a majority coalition with a broad parliamentary basis. However, the elections of 1991 resulted for the first time in the formation of a Government that was not formed across the dividing line between the political blocs; the Government was composed entirely of non-Socialist parties, with the post of Prime Minister going to Esko Aho of the Centre Party, the election winners.

In the course of a few decades Finnish parliamentary democracy has gone through a considerable transformation. From being a parliamen-

tary democracy characterised by unstable minority governments, it has shifted to a pattern of government based on coalitions with a parliamentary majority. 1966 was a turning-point in this process. During the 1980s the power of the president has also been reduced somewhat. The crux of Finnish government has shifted from the president to the interplay between Government and parliament. Although Finland indisputably retains a dualistic system, a trend has developed towards the strengthening of the elements that characterise parliamentary democracy.

Norway

In one regard, Norway can be seen as constituting the antithesis to Finland. Whereas broad coalitions have been a dominant feature of Finnish parliamentary democracy, there has been no Norwegian coalition formed across the boundary between the Socialist and non-Socialist parties in the whole post-war period. The Labour Party governed alone between 1946 and 1963, mostly on the basis of a majority in the *Storting*. The Gerhardsen Government resigned over the issue of the Government's responsibility for an accident on Svalbard, when the Socialist People's Party voted with the non-Socialist parties against the Government. Although the non-Socialist minority government which then took office could only hang on for a few weeks, it was returned after the defeat of the Labour Party at the ensuing election. Per Borten of the Centre Party was Prime Minister between 1965 and 1971. Conflicts in relation to Norwegian membership of the EEC led to repeated government crises, but the Labour Party found itself back in government between 1973 and 1981, albeit as a minority government. There was a change of government after the 1981 elections and Kaare Willoch, leader of the Conservatives, became Prime Minister. The other non-Socialist parties did not, however, join the Government until 1983 when the parliamentary basis of the Government was broadened to include representatives of the Centre Party and the Christian Democrats. This gave the Willoch Government the support of a majority in the *Storting*. The election of 1985 brought with it the loss of an overall majority for the three-party non-Socialist government and the Government was forced to depend on the two votes of the Progress Party for a majority. The following year the Willoch Government resigned when it was defeated in the *Storting*. A government crisis was finally resolved when the Labour Party formed a

minority government under Gro Harlem Brundtland. History repeated itself with the 1989 elections. A non-Socialist government was formed but lacked an overall majority; it resigned a year after the election and once again the Labour Party was back in office as a minority government.

In the course of less than two decades Norway has changed from a stable consensus-oriented parliamentary system with majority governments to a more conflictual and unstable pattern of minority governments.

Sweden

The principal features of the changes that have occurred in the Swedish parliamentary system are very similar to what took place in Norway. The Social Democrats played an equally dominant role in the first decades after the war. However, it was the exception rather than the rule for the Social Democrats to have a majority of their own in the lower house of the *Riksdag*, and they were joined in government by the Farmers' League between 1951 and 1957. The period of uninterrupted Social Democratic rule lasted for slightly more than a decade longer than in Norway. It was not until 1976 that the non-Socialist parties were able to form a Government. The resulting three-party non-Socialist coalition broke down over differences of opinion on the nuclear power issue in 1978 but found itself back in office after the elections of 1979 only to collapse once more in 1981 as a result of differences on taxation policy.

Having won the election of 1982, Olof Palme formed a minority Social Democratic government which remained in power over the two subsequent elections. Ingvar Carlsson took over as Prime Minister after Palme's death in 1986. The Social Democratic government's parliamentary support became increasingly fragile. The results of the 1988 election and the arrival of a new party in parliament served only to increase the fragmentation of the *Riksdag*. The Left Party seemed less and less certain of being able to maintain its electoral support. The government resigned at the beginning of 1990 when it failed to gain a parliamentary majority for a package of measures to deal with the economic crisis. The crisis of government, however, ended with the return of the Carlsson Government with its support in parliament unchanged.

After losing the 1991 election, the Carlsson Government was replaced

by a non-Socialist coalition with the Conservative leader, Carl Bildt, as Prime Minister. Although the ruling coalition is made up of four parties, it lacks a majority in the *Riksdag*. The fragmentation of the political parties has made it increasingly difficult to form governments.

Denmark

The situation of governments in Denmark has been significantly less stable, partly because the Social Democrats have not been in as commanding a position as their counterparts in Sweden and Norway, partly because party splits since the beginning of the 1970s have made it difficult to form working majorities. The Social Democrats were in power from 1947 to 1950 and from 1953 to 1968, first as a minority government and then in coalition with non-Socialist parties. After the elections of 1966 the Social Democrats were able to stay in power with the support of the Socialist People's Party, although the latter never formally entered government. Between 1968 and 1971, non-Socialist parties – the Social Liberals, the Conservatives and the Liberals – formed a majority coalition government. There were non-Socialist minority governments in power from 1973 to 1975 and from 1982 to 1993. In the intervening years there was a Social Democratic Prime Minister from 1978 to 1979, this time in coalition with the Liberals.

Statistical information about which parties have been in power can be misleading. Although it is beyond dispute that Denmark had the same Prime Minister between 1982 and 1993 and was ruled by non-Socialist parties, this picture disguises the difficulties experienced by governments in winning parliamentary support for their proposals. During the period between 1982 and 1988, the Government lost more than one hundred votes. There were only three occasions on which it refused to accept defeat: new elections were called in 1983 after its budget proposals were voted down; a national referendum was called in 1986 when the *Folketing* refused to approve the Single European Act; and the Government went to the polls in 1988, having lost for the twenty-third time a vote on defence and security policy. The elections of 1990 were called when the Government was unable to gain support for its tax proposals. The results meant that the Social Liberals left the coalition, and this narrowed even further the basis of the Government's parliamentary support.

The non-socialist two-party coalition resigned in 1993 after a scandal involving the prime minister. The Social Democrats were then able to form a government together with three non-socialist parties.

Danish political scientists have pointed out that in the light of the experiences of the 1980s, a whole range of received ideas about politics will have to be re-evaluated. A government can lose one vote of confidence after another and still remain in power. Parliamentary decisions are sometimes made by the opposition. The patterns of majorities differ from one political arena to another. The Government is in opposition, the opposition governs.

Iceland

The pattern of party politics in Iceland differs from that of the other Nordic countries. No single party has ever had a majority in the *Althing*, but the fact that the number of parties has hardly ever been more than four has also meant that possible coalition combinations have been much fewer. Nevertheless there has been a very large number of coalitions, as is shown in table 5.1. A persistent feature of the post-war period has been the presence in government of the Independence Party which due to its dominant position has often filled the post of Prime Minister. The formation of coalitions has been made more complicated by the fact that political parties in Iceland cannot be easily fitted into a traditional model based on a left-right axis. The major problem areas for the parties in seeking to work together have been defence and foreign affairs. Although both the "centre parties", the Social Democrats and the Progressives, accept Iceland's membership of NATO, the Progressive Party has been more negatively disposed to the American military base at Keflavik. On this vital issue the Social Democrats have therefore been seen as being "to the right" of the Progressives.

Throughout the 1960s Iceland was ruled by a coalition made up of the two parties that defended the American military presence, the Independence Party and the Social Democrats. An exceptional situation arose in 1980 when a protracted government crisis was resolved with the deputy leader of the Independence Party forming a Government, against the wishes of his party, with the People's Alliance, the Progressives, and two other members of his party. A non-Socialist government was formed after the elections of 1983 by a coalition of the Progressives and the Inde-

pendence Party. The government lost its majority in the elections of 1987. The Social Democrats were then brought into government to broaden the basis of the coalition. The policy of the Independence Party of solving the financial crisis by deregulation and a reduction in subsidies led to a government crisis in 1988. The outcome saw the Independence Party leave government which was subsequently formed by a coalition of four parties. The Independence Party returned to power after the 1991 elections, this time in coalition with the Social Democrats.

Åland

The provincial administration (*Landskapsstyrelse*) on Åland was previously constituted as a “unity” coalition government in which all the political factions were represented in proportion to their numbers in the *Lagting* (then known as the *Landsting*). The principle of parliamentary democracy was made legally binding in 1972 with the introduction of a law enabling the *Lagting* to force the administration to resign by means of a vote of no confidence. This option was used in 1975 and 1983.

A new parliamentary system was introduced in 1987. The procedure offers three possible solutions. The first and main aim of the procedure is the formation of a government in which all parties are represented. If this proves impossible, a majority government may be appointed. A minority government may not be appointed, however. If negotiations for both a unity government and a majority government are unsuccessful, a government will be formed from members of each party in direct proportion to their representation, i.e. in line with the method previously used.

This new procedure was first implemented in 1988. A unity government proved not to be possible. The Centre Party, the Liberals and the Conservatives formed a majority government.

The Faroes

The relationship between the executive and the legislative bodies is constructed on a rather different basis from that obtaining in fully independent states. The members of the executive body are appointed directly by “parliament”. This is a form of positive parliamentarism; on taking office a government has to have the declared support of the people’s

representatives. The Executive Council (*Landsstyre*) of the Faroes has in consequence always enjoyed the support of the majority in the *Lagting*. Usually at least three parties are needed to form a majority coalition. Two parties were able to form a combined majority for the first time as a result of the 1991 election, and the Social Democrats and the Conservative People's Party went on to form the government.

Greenland

In the years following the introduction of home rule, the chairman of the Executive Council (*Landsstyre*) was also the Speaker of the *Landsting*. A purely parliamentary system of government – with a distinction drawn between the Government and Parliament – has been in effect since 1988.

Ever since independence the Social Democratic *Siumut* party has formed part of the Executive Council of the Greenland government although it has never had a majority in the *Landsting*. The situation in parliament reflects Greenland's economic situation. Major investment has not produced the desired results. Dependence on prawn and shrimp fisheries has made the economy vulnerable and dependent on subsidy from Denmark. The closure of the greater part of the American military bases is expected soon, which would mean the loss of a major source of income. The advantageous fishing agreement with the European Union runs out in 1995. The non-Socialist Unionist Party (*Attasut*) which campaigned for closer links with the EC lost ground at the elections of 1991. *Siumut* is therefore expected to stay in power with the support of the left-wing Independence party.

The Problems of Parliamentary Government

The survey in table 5.1 provides a basis for comparison between the various ways the Nordic countries have found of dealing with the government issue during the post-war period. In all the Nordic countries two "blocs" can be identified, on the one side the Social Democrats and the parties of the Left, on the other the non-Socialist parties. The coalition patterns demonstrate, however, that the political boundary between the blocs has been of varying importance. The blocs are most clearly demarcated in Norway: at no time since 1945 has a coalition government been

Table 5.2 The Parliamentary Basis of the Nordic Governments

Type of Government		Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
Single-party	Majority	0	0	0	36	4
Coalition	Majority	27	77	96	18	21
Single-party	Minority	48	12	4	40	70
Coalition	Minority	25	5	0	6	5
Caretaker Government		0	6	0	0	0
Percentage Total		100	100	100	100	100

The table identifies for what percentage of the period between 1945 and 1990 each country was governed by a particular type of government

formed across the bloc boundary. Sweden has many similarities with Norway in this respect. With the exception of the "Red-Green" coalition between 1951 and 1957, governing coalitions have only been formed by parties on one side of the bloc. In Denmark the blocs are much less homogeneous. Iceland and Finland, in particular, are countries in which governing coalitions composed of socialist and "bourgeois" or non-Socialist parties are the rule rather than the exception.

This same difference appears in table 5.2 which presents a survey of the parliamentary support of the various governments. Iceland and Finland have been governed by majority coalitions for most of the period. Norway stands out because of a long period of Social Democratic majority government. In Sweden and Denmark governments have lacked parliamentary majorities for most of the post-war period.

A comparison of parliamentary government in the Nordic countries shows that great changes have taken place. A few decades ago, Norway and Sweden were the prototypes of stable government. The political dominance of the Social Democrats seemed permanent. At that time Finland was their antithesis with its frequent government crises. Today the roles are reversed. Not only Denmark but Norway and Sweden as well are now characterised by unstable minority governments. Finland is governed by broadly-based majority coalitions.

The fact that a government has a majority of its own need not be decisive. Because of the provisions of the Finnish constitution, many important decisions require a qualified majority in order to be passed without delay. The deciding factor in these cases is not whether the Government

has the support of one half, but whether it can muster the support of two-thirds or five-sixths of parliament. This constitutional principle is one of the important reasons why Finnish governments are often formed from broadly-based majority coalitions.

In countries in which the governing parties lack a majority of their own the Government has to find other ways of winning support for its policies. In Sweden Social Democratic governments have for years been able to rely on the support of the Communists in parliament. During the era of the bicameral parliament, the Social Democrats enjoyed the advantage of being over-represented in the Upper House of the *Riksdag*. The Danish term *støttepartier* refers to supporting parties that collaborate in a stable partnership with the governing party, but do not form part of the Government. During the 1970s the lack of supporting parties of this kind forced minority governments to forge temporary alliances in order to gain a majority for its economic policy, or for its housing policy etc. This makes the situation in parliament ambiguous. Whereas certain opposition parties consistently vote against government proposals, others make compromises with the Government. The parliamentary basis of support for a minority government can therefore vary in the course of a parliament's life and shift from issue to issue.

The Workings of Government

Members of the government have two main tasks. Subject to the control of parliament, they make up a country's ruling political authority. Secondly, the Government heads the administration whose task is to implement the decisions made by parliament and Government.

The number of members of the Government is at present 24 in Denmark, 21 in Sweden, 19 in Norway, 17 in Finland, and 10 in Iceland. Individual members of the Government (Cabinet ministers) are officially known as *statsråd* in Sweden and Norway, and *minister* in Finland and in Denmark. The term *statsråd* also means State Council and has additional significance in Denmark, Norway and Finland, where it is used to describe the collective body (the Cabinet) that is formally responsible for making government decisions.

Government Decisions

Major government decisions are signed by the head of state in Denmark, Norway, and Iceland. The Swedish monarch no longer has even a ceremonial role to play in the making of government decisions. In real terms, executive power lies solely with the Government in these four countries. The situation is somewhat different in Finland since executive power is shared between the Government and the president. Most matters lying within the president's competence are formally decided on by "the President in Council"; the exceptions to this are military matters and the major part of foreign policy decision-making in practice. Matters are presented to the State Council (the Cabinet and the President) by a particular minister in the presence of the whole government. However, the president is legally free to reach whatever decision he likes. Every minister is responsible for the decisions of the State Council, unless he expressly reserves his position and has this entered into the record. Apart from those matters decided on by the president and those delegated to individual ministers, other issues are resolved at the general meetings of the State Council at which the Prime Minister is in the chair.

Although the whole government is, politically speaking, responsible for the all the decisions it makes, the Nordic countries differ widely on the number of issues on which decisions are made collectively, by the government as a whole. Sweden is in a special position to the extent that only very few and subordinate matters are dealt with by individual ministers; government matters are decided as a rule at meetings of the Government as a whole. Finland and Norway are somewhere in the middle: the most important matters are decided collectively, but a relatively large number of matters are dealt with by the minister responsible. In Denmark and Iceland only a few issues are resolved collectively, normal practice in these countries being that individual ministers make the decisions.

Preparation and Co-ordination

These differences seem much less significant, however, if we take not only the formal but also the actual processes of decision-making into account. In each country, the distinction is drawn between the meetings at which the official decision is reached – the point of these is most frequently simply to confirm the decision, and no debate of the issue takes

place – and the informal consultations where the real decisions are made. There are no rules in the constitution covering this area; each government arranges its own internal workings. In some instances, governments have formed special Cabinet Committees to deal with specific kinds of issue. In Denmark there were twenty or more committees of this kind during the 1980s, dealing, for example, with finance, security and planning. In Finland there are Cabinet Committees, for example, on foreign affairs, budgetary matters and economic policy. The Finance Ministry has a special co-ordinating role when it comes to departmental appropriations. The last few decades have seen a growth in importance of the Prime Minister's role, one of the consequences of which has been the increase in the financial resources of the Government Office. (The Government Office is known in Sweden as *statsrådsberedningen*, in Denmark as *statsministeriet*, in Norway as *statsministerens kontor*, and in Finland as *statsrådets kansli*.) The need for internal coordination becomes particularly great during periods of coalition government when numerous negotiations and modifications of positions may have to be made between the parties before a formal government decision can be pronounced. Compared with the situation in countries such as Denmark and Iceland, coalition governments have a hard time of it in Sweden where the collective responsibility of the government is so strongly emphasised.

Each minister has a staff of civil servants to help him in dealing with government matters. In some cases a minister may be responsible for more than one department, alternatively several ministers may have to share the running of a single department. The dividing line between the minister's tasks of political control on the one hand, and the execution of administrative responsibility on the other, has been drawn in a number of different ways in the Nordic countries.

6

Public Administration and the Judiciary

A large public sector is considered to be one of the distinguishing characteristics of the typical society of the Nordic model. However, the general historical background to this phenomenon is not unique to the Nordic countries but shared by all the developed industrial nations. Taking place in the course of a single century, the sheer scale of the expansion of the state makes this one of the most significant social changes. The public sector was brought into being to solve a number of social problems, but the resultant vast state bureaucracy has created new problems all of its own.

The major expansion of state activity in the course of the last hundred years has put the organisation of public administration to a severe test. It has gained new responsibilities in the fields of planning, information and co-ordination. Administration is no longer confined to the final stage of the political decision-making process. Public administration also has a vital role to play in the preparation of new legislation as it is responsible for collecting information, commissioning research, making prognoses and projections, and elaborating proposals.

In certain respects public administration has even taken over the articulation of specific group interests. The responsibilities of the Consumer Affairs Ombudsman, and of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman and similar officials, are to further the interests of particular groups through state measures.

Table 6.1 Taxation

<i>Percentage of GDP 1991</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Finland</i>	<i>Iceland</i>	<i>Norway</i>	<i>Sweden</i>
Central Government Taxes	31.8	23.5	23.4	24.7	21.7
Social Security Contributions	1.5	4.4	2.3	12.2	15.3
Local Authority Taxes	14.9	9.6	6.8	9.6	16.2
Total of Taxes and Contributions	48.2	37.5	32.6	46.5	53.2

Source: Yearbook of Nordic Statistics 1993

The Size of the Public Sector

The same general trend can be discerned in all the Nordic countries. The public sector has been greatly expanded, whether this is measured in terms of the tax burden, or the economic scale of state activity, or the number of employees in the public sector.

There are, however, some clear differences between the five countries. The tax burden, that proportion of GDP made up of taxes and deductions, is highest in Sweden and Denmark (table 6.1). Iceland has what is in relative terms the smallest public sector. The tax burden is also below the Nordic average in Finland (but roughly in the middle range of OECD countries). In Nordic terms, it is Norway that finds itself occupying the middle ground. In the early 1990s the relative size of the public sector in Finland and Sweden grew primarily due to increasing unemployment and decreasing gross domestic product.

Another measure of the scale of the public sector is the proportion of the national work-force it employs. But this does nothing to affect the general picture. The same rankings of public sector size apply using this criterion as well – Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland, in descending order. Within each country the course of events has been the same. In the course of a few decades the proportion of the work-force employed in the public sector has increased markedly. Even though the late 1980s may have damped this down to some extent, there has been only a minor reduction in numbers.

The Swedish Agency for Administrative Development has attempted to compare the production costs of public services in the Nordic countries. Despite the obvious difficulties involved in making such comparisons and despite problems of measurement, it was able to conclude that

the costs of public services were significantly greater in Sweden. Several factors were put forward to explain this difference. Firstly, public services are made up of component parts that may prove quite dissimilar. For example, in Sweden it is usual for children at schools and nurseries to get a hot meal free of charge. Secondly, organisational factors have a significant effect on costs. In Sweden there is a greater number of staff and they are also better paid. In the other Nordic countries public services face more competition from private institutions; voluntary and charity work is more common there as well. The other Nordic countries have also set up management systems that provide a greater degree of freedom of choice and more flexibility than in Sweden.

Other studies also show that the Swedish public sector, particularly the tax system and transfers, have had a considerable redistributive effect. Equalisation of incomes has been comparatively far-reaching in Sweden.

Administrative Policy

Since the end of the 1970s, the public sector has become a problem area all of its own. All the Nordic countries have tried various ways of dealing with the negative consequences of state bureaucracy: inefficiency, rigidity, lack of public scrutiny, and insensitivity when faced with new demands from citizens and politicians. In a period when the socio-economic situation is no longer considered capable of sustaining any increase in taxation, determined efforts have been made to get "value for money". Demands on the public sector are growing, but resources have remained unchanged or have been reduced in real terms.

The term *administrative policy* refers to ideas and measures targeted at the organisation and working methods of the administration. The general goals of administrative policy are the same in the Nordic countries as in other industrial nations. Great effort is being put into achieving savings and improving standards of service. Different countries have chosen various methods of changing the public sector in particular areas.

All the Nordic countries have special organs of government, commissions of inquiry and working-parties, whose task is to scrutinise the workings of the administration of government. At the beginning of the

1980s the Icelandic government declared that it intended to simplify the administration of government and to increase the control of the legislative authority over the executive. The Danish government currently presents its modernisation program in an annual report on the public sector. There is also a program in Finland aimed at transforming public administration with the emphasis on decentralisation, improved service, efficiency, and better management practices. The Swedish program for the renewal of the public sector is usually shaped by, and put forward as part of, the annual budgetary proposals.

Within government itself, responsibility for administration has sometimes lain with a particular ministry (as in Norway and Sweden between 1982 and 1991), or the Finance Ministry (in Denmark, and in Sweden from 1991), or as is the case in Finland with a special ministerial committee with responsibility for administrative matters.

Improving Efficiency

One of the most important points in the modernisation programs of all the Nordic countries is the urgent need to improve efficiency and productivity. The first step has been to develop methods and measuring techniques so as to be able to monitor public service production in relation to its costs. Even at this early stage the difficulties have been very considerable. Quantitative indicators often have low validity. Nevertheless, different measures have been devised to enable comparisons to be made of how public service production costs vary between local authorities, for example, and over time.

The attempts to devise yardsticks for measuring the efficiency of the public sector can be considered an example of the information dividend, as a means of learning from experience. A key concept is evaluation. The increased attention paid to costs and benefits is intended to raise awareness about the link between the resources that have been expended and the results that have been produced. Another key word is quality.

Administrative procedures have also been subject to attempts to increase productivity. Computer technology has been made use of to automate routines for preparation, decision-making, and implementation.

Reorganisation

In the older type of public administration, the legal element was prominent. A large part of administrative work was devoted to implementing decisions by applying general principles to individual cases. Nowadays it is more usual for legislation to be so shaped as to provide a general framework of law. Management by objectives is replacing government by the rule-book. The legislative organs set out the general goals while the administrative bodies work out the more detailed regulations.

This change in working methods has also left its mark on the development of the organisational structure of public administration. The traditional kind of public authority is still the norm. But there are in addition a multiplicity of hybrid forms and various agencies. This great myriad of public organisations shows features common to all the countries concerned. In every country the forms of management for a number of operations, e.g. public companies, the mail, telecommunications, the railways, allow little room for detailed political control. In other areas, the administration of foreign affairs is one example, the options available to governments to intervene in day to day operations are quite different.

The experiences of the Nordic countries in this respect are in no sense unique. Two concepts have come to dominate international debate on this issue, "overload" – a concern that the enormous growth in state activities is leading to a paralysis of decision-making, and "ungovernability" – the idea that the machinery of public administration has, as a result of its increasing complexity, lost its capacity to manage social change.

The most far-reaching form of reorganisation has been privatisation, the transfer of responsibilities from public to private hands. No Nordic country has implemented any significant degree of privatisation. But the concept of privatisation is not clear-cut. There are several different aspects to privatisation. Although there has been little transfer of responsibility from public to private ownership through the selling-off of public utilities, an increasing number of private enterprises have been making inroads on the public sector. Public services are being transferred from traditional authorities to companies which, although they may be publicly owned, operate under the same conditions as privately-owned companies. Tasks previously done by central or local government are being contracted out to private entrepreneurs.

Organisational changes are also taking place within the administra-

tion. Middle-level management is being abolished and organisational hierarchies are being “flattened out”. Detailed responsibility for the management of operations is being shifted to local units that are being given greater independence.

Deregulation

Deregulation and the process of simplifying regulations are among the elements involved in the attempts to counteract bureaucracy. A feature of these changes is the reduction in the regulation of society by the state in order to achieve increased competition. Deregulation of this kind has been carried out most notably in the currency, transport, and credit markets, as well as in the agriculture and foodstuffs markets. Another form of deregulation involves a weeding-out of the laws and regulations that go to make up the regulatory apparatus of the state. The aim here is to avoid costly, redundant and inefficient regulations and make the legal rules clear, simple and practical. In Sweden laws governing the public management of schools have been made simpler. In Denmark, attempts to simplify the rules have been targeted not least at the complex legal structure of taxation and the field of social affairs.

Decentralisation

The general meaning of decentralisation covers the transfer of authority from a higher to a lower level. In all the Nordic countries, the largest part of public administration at local level is carried out by the municipal authorities or “communes”, as they are known throughout Scandinavia (*kommuner*). The most obvious example of decentralisation at work can be found in the ever increasing responsibilities of local government. The effects of these changes on the municipal authorities is dealt with in a special section later in this chapter.

Traditionally the capital city has been the seat of the central administration. This is nowadays only partly true in the Nordic countries. In the course of the last few decades a number of attempts have been made in Sweden, Norway and Finland – which are the Nordic countries with the most extensive territorial areas – to move central administrative agencies from the centre to other regions. Strictly speaking this is not true decentralisation and ought instead to be referred to as relocation.

The practical consequences of relocation vary widely. Firstly, there is often a large gap between the idea and its execution. There has been extensive discussion in Norway and Finland, but little has actually been done. In Sweden, on the other hand, 48 administrative authorities or parts of authorities have been moved from Stockholm to 16 other locations. This relocation has affected 10,000 employees. The difference between the countries, according to a dissertation on the subject, would seem to be the result of political factors. The greater degree of decisiveness witnessed in Sweden can be attributed to a powerful government which has been able to exert its influence over the other protagonists in the political system with a much greater degree of authority than the governments of Norway and Finland (Isaksson 1989).

Personnel Policy

The role played by central government civil servants has gone through enormous changes during the course of history. In former times the organisational nucleus of the administration was made up of high-ranking civil servants, who frequently had employees of their own to take care of their duties.

Since that time, the differences between various categories of civil servant have diminished. However, civil servants in the highest echelons still enjoy a special status. In Denmark and in Norway they are appointed by the sovereign, in Finland and in Iceland by the president, and in Sweden by the Government. Special rules apply for judges. Party political affiliations have been a much discussed issue in relation to the criteria for the appointment of government civil servants. Particularly in Finland and in Iceland, political service has come to play a large role in appointments to high ranking posts. The links between the political parties and public administration in Finland have been reinforced since civil servants are represented on the central committees of the major parties. The bureaucracy has been politicised and the political parties bureaucratised.

The nature of the employment contract in the civil service used to be characterised by the supremacy of the state and the obedience of the civil service. The rules governing the employment of civil servants have come increasingly to resemble the rest of the labour market. Civil servants nowadays have the right to strike, to make binding agreements, and to

take industrial action. In Denmark the trade union rights of civil servants have been subject to gradual changes of practice. Laws permitting free collective bargaining and the right to strike were introduced in Norway in 1958, in Sweden in 1965, and in Finland in 1970. Legislation or agreements on industrial democracy for public sector employees have been introduced in all the Nordic countries in the course of the 1970s; the most far-reaching regulations are to be found in Sweden.

The main effect of administrative policy in the last decade has been for the personnel policies of both central and local government to become more flexible. The terms of employment at central and local government level have come increasingly to resemble those applying in the private sector. Opportunities for promotion are increasingly dependent on individual competence. Salary scales have been individualised and profit-related wages introduced.

Citizen Control

One of the most crucial problems facing the modern welfare state is the relationship between democracy and bureaucracy. How are central and local government officials on the one hand to be guaranteed professional autonomy, and yet on the other be made accountable to democratic control by both the public and politicians? Various methods have been tried out over the years to strengthen democratic control over the administration.

A particular characteristic of public administration in the Nordic countries is the element of lay representation. Professional civil servants have been forced to share power with representatives of various groups and interests in society. Lay control in Swedish and Finnish central administrative agencies provides one example, the Swedish county administrative boards another. The presence of representatives of interest groups is particularly pronounced on advisory bodies, such as the various councils that have been set up in Denmark and in Norway. It is normal practice for representatives of the interest groups concerned to be appointed to the temporary committees and commissions of inquiry set up by governments to study particular issues. In Sweden in particular, the system of official commissions of inquiry and the concomitant process of referral to the various interest organisations concerned have served as an important channel for the interest organisations in exerting

influence on the political process. Commissions of this kind are frequent in Finland and Norway as well. In some cases the administrative responsibilities of civil servants have actually been transferred to organisations, formally endowed only with private legal status. However, the incorporation of interest organisations within public administration has proved to have disadvantages of its own and has led to a backlash. The relationship between the interest organisations and the state will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter.

The emphasis in current administrative policy is placed on the influence of the individual citizen on the public sector. A necessary precondition for this kind of influence is that the rules, the institutions, and their personnel must all be predisposed to take the wishes and needs of the citizen into account.

By a “responsive” public sector is meant a system of administration that is comprehensible, accessible, service-oriented, and so structured as to allow the public to participate in the provision of public services. Under headings such as “client participation” and “consumer influence”, various forms of participation and self-administration are being experimented with from the point of view of the citizen. Denmark has gone furthest in this direction and has, for example, introduced a system in which parents of pupils at a particular school elect a parental council which controls the way the school is run.

Legal Control

Control over the administration takes place in a variety of ways. The opportunities for scrutiny and control available to the parliaments have already been looked at. The mass media and public debate have a major role to play in providing opportunities for the examination of the administration on a day to day basis. Sweden has the longest tradition of public access to information on the administration; the principle of openness in public administration, known as *allmänna handlingars offentlighet*, was laid down in the Freedom of the Press Act of 1766. This rule also applies in Finland, although there the confidentiality provisions are somewhat stricter. Denmark and Norway have followed suit, although with less public access than in Swedish administration. The principle of freedom of information does not apply in Norway to the *Storting* and to the courts.

There is a considerable degree of difference between the West and the East Nordic traditions of legal control of public administration. The courts of Denmark, Norway, and Iceland can review decisions made by the administration. The court can nullify a decision if it finds that it has not been made according to the regulations prescribed by law. Sweden and Finland have instead a system of special courts for administrative matters. The highest court of this kind in Sweden and Finland is the Supreme Court of Administration.

Recently, however, special appeal courts for administrative matters have been introduced in Denmark and Norway as well. These administrative courts of appeal play a prominent role within the social affairs sphere and the Danish tax system. Administrative procedures in Denmark have long remained relatively unregulated and mainly determined by tradition. But in 1985 a law on administration was passed containing legal provisions on challenges, objections, access to information for both parties, appeals, as well as requiring that public bodies make known to the parties concerned the basis on which the decision was reached and that they must initiate this disclosure themselves. Laws on public administration have also been introduced in Norway (1967), Sweden (1971), Finland (1982), and Iceland (1987). Apart from minor differences of detail, the main provisions of these laws are very similar. They contain provisions on objections, access to information for the parties concerned, hearings for the parties, the reasons for the decision, the delegation of the decision and appeal procedures. Despite their historical differences, the Nordic countries are coming increasingly to resemble one another in this area – a trend also to be seen with regard to other aspects of public administration.

The Results of Administrative Policy

There are two factors that make any assessment of the practical consequences of administrative policy more difficult. Firstly, what has been summarily referred to under the heading of administration in these pages is in fact made up of a large number of component parts. Secondly, there is no agreement about what constitutes the criterion for determining whether the policy has succeeded or not. There is also a tendency for expectations to rise as part of the process. A measure of success may seem like failure against a background of rising expectations.

Nevertheless, the general consensus is that the results of administrative policy have been mediocre until now. With little more than a decade for perspective, there has been no decisive change in the public sector. Overall public sector costs remain at much the same level. Rules, institutions, and working practices seem much the same. A large number of governments that have come to power on a program of reforming the public sector have been forced to bow to the inherent might of bureaucratic inertia.

Anyone who expected swift and tangible material results is therefore likely to be disappointed. Changes have often been greatest at the symbolic level. However, if a more long term view of administrative policy is adopted, it is clear that a shift is taking place away from the kind of public sector that seemed not so long ago to form the bedrock of the prototypical Nordic welfare state. It is from this perspective that the administrative policy of the 1980s can be seen as a turning-point.

The Administration of the State

Two Traditions of Administration

It is usual practice to distinguish between a West and an East Nordic administrative tradition. The Danish model of ministerial administration, which is the most widespread from an international perspective, recurs in modified form in both Norway and Iceland. This organisational model is based on the principle that a minister can be held responsible for any decision made by that part of the administration he controls. To some extent, the Swedish system with its independent central administrative agencies (*ämbetsverk*) has also left its mark on public administration in Finland. This model is based on an organisational split or dualism, between the government ministry on the one hand and on the other the administrative agency. Swedish administrative authorities are subordinated to the Government as a whole and not to a particular minister.

In Denmark a minister has a dual role, both as the person responsible for the ministry he controls and as a member of the collective decision-making body of the Government in which he serves. A Danish minister may be subject to the scrutiny of the *Folketing's* Parliamentary Ombuds-

man as the individual responsible for administration. But the Swedish Parliamentary Ombudsman has no right to question a Swedish government minister. A Danish minister can be questioned on specific administrative matters in the *Folketing*. In Sweden members of the Government avoid discussing matters of substance; accusations of "ministerial rule" are a regularly recurring theme in the reports made by the Constitutional Committee on ministers.

The difference between the West and East Nordic forms of administration are actually quite considerable and explain the significant dissimilarities between political life in Denmark and Sweden that still exist today. But major changes to the organisational development of public administration in practice have occurred in all the countries concerned and there is an observable trend towards convergence of the two systems.

This is why in Denmark, and in Norway as well, special boards and councils have been set up which are in a more independent position vis-à-vis the minister in charge. This development involves moving closer to the Swedish model. On the other hand debate in Sweden is frequently determined by a concern that the traditionally independent administration is not sufficiently responsive to the avowed intentions of politicians. Throughout the 1980s the relationship between the ministries and the central administrative agencies was the subject of commissions of inquiry and debate. By itself the increase in the number of laws, regulations, matters, and decisions has forced changes in the organisation of the administration. In a ministerial administration of the Danish kind it is a practical impossibility for a minister to adopt a personal position on every matter. The organisational changes that have taken place have been mainly aimed at delegating much of the detailed work to subordinates while retaining for the minister those matters of greatest political significance.

Denmark

The administration of government in Denmark is divided into ministries. The term "department" is also used in Denmark but only to describe the civil service staff who are directly answerable to the minister. The highest ranking civil servant in a ministry is the Permanent Under-Secretary (*departementschef*) who heads the "department". There is no

post that corresponds to the Under-Secretary of State found in Sweden and Norway.

The responsibilities of the "department" include dealing with overall planning, budgetary matters, and the drafting of legislation. The trend in recent years has been to restrict the size of the "department" in order to increase its efficiency. The largest part of the actual work of administration is carried out within directorates, which correspond to the central administrative agencies in Sweden. Normally each directorate is under the control of the head of the "department". A number of directorates dealing with matters of a more technical nature are in a lateral rather than subordinate position. To an increasing extent, various non-departmental bodies have been introduced which remain outside direct ministerial control.

Iceland

Central administration in Iceland resembles that of Denmark although the ministries are naturally less extensive. The independent decision-making powers of the minister are very wide-ranging. The highest-ranking civil servant is the Permanent Under-Secretary, or head of department, as in Denmark.

Norway

Norway also has a ministerial system of administration; however, there are a greater number of public bodies that are independent of the minister. Just as in Denmark, organisational changes have been introduced the purpose of which is to strengthen the political management of ministries. As part of this trend the post of Under-Secretary of State (*statssekreterare*) was introduced in 1947 as a political appointment. Under-Secretaries of State are directly answerable to the minister and help with the political management of the work of the ministry. The highest ranking civil servant is known as the Permanent Under-Secretary (*departementsråd*). Day to day administrative operations are run mainly by directorates. The precise nature of their relationship to ministerial authority varies from instance to instance. Whereas some directorates, as in Denmark, are under the direct control of the minister, there are a relatively large number of Norwegian directorates that have a considerable

degree of independence. In Norwegian administrative terminology these more autonomous bodies are known as the *ytre etater*. And as in Denmark there are a number of bodies in Norway which are not subject to a particular minister but run by a specially appointed executive body; these consist of advisory bodies and tribunals.

Sweden

Although Swedish departments function as preparatory staffs for the Government, most of their employees are apolitical civil servants. With a change of government, it is normally only the Under-Secretary of State, who is the departmental minister's closest colleague, the press secretary, and political advisors, that are changed. The Under-Secretary for Legal Affairs is responsible for the judicial scrutiny of proposed legislation. The Permanent Under-Secretary is the chief administrative official of the ministry. Government ministries are divided into various units for dealing with different aspects of the responsibilities of the department. The form of management of the independent central administrative agencies varies: in former times the administrative agencies were run by a collegiate body of civil servants, or by a single civil servant. Nowadays the management is usually in the form of an executive board made up of public officials, politicians and representatives of the organised interest groups.

It should be pointed out that even the regulations currently at its disposal provide the Swedish government with several different ways of controlling the administration. Various operations can be restricted or expanded through budgetary measures; directives can be issued to public authorities by means of decrees and regulations; and the government directly appoints the highest ranking public officials. A distinction is drawn between government matters and administrative matters. With regard to the former the Government functions as the country's ruling political body, to the latter as the supreme administrative instance (matters of this kind are mostly to do with appointments and appeals). The constitution prevents the Government involving itself in the handling of individual matters concerning the exercise of public authority and the implementation of laws. Furthermore the Swedish constitution is considered to provide the Government with considerable scope to control actively the work of public administration. An exception to Swedish ad-

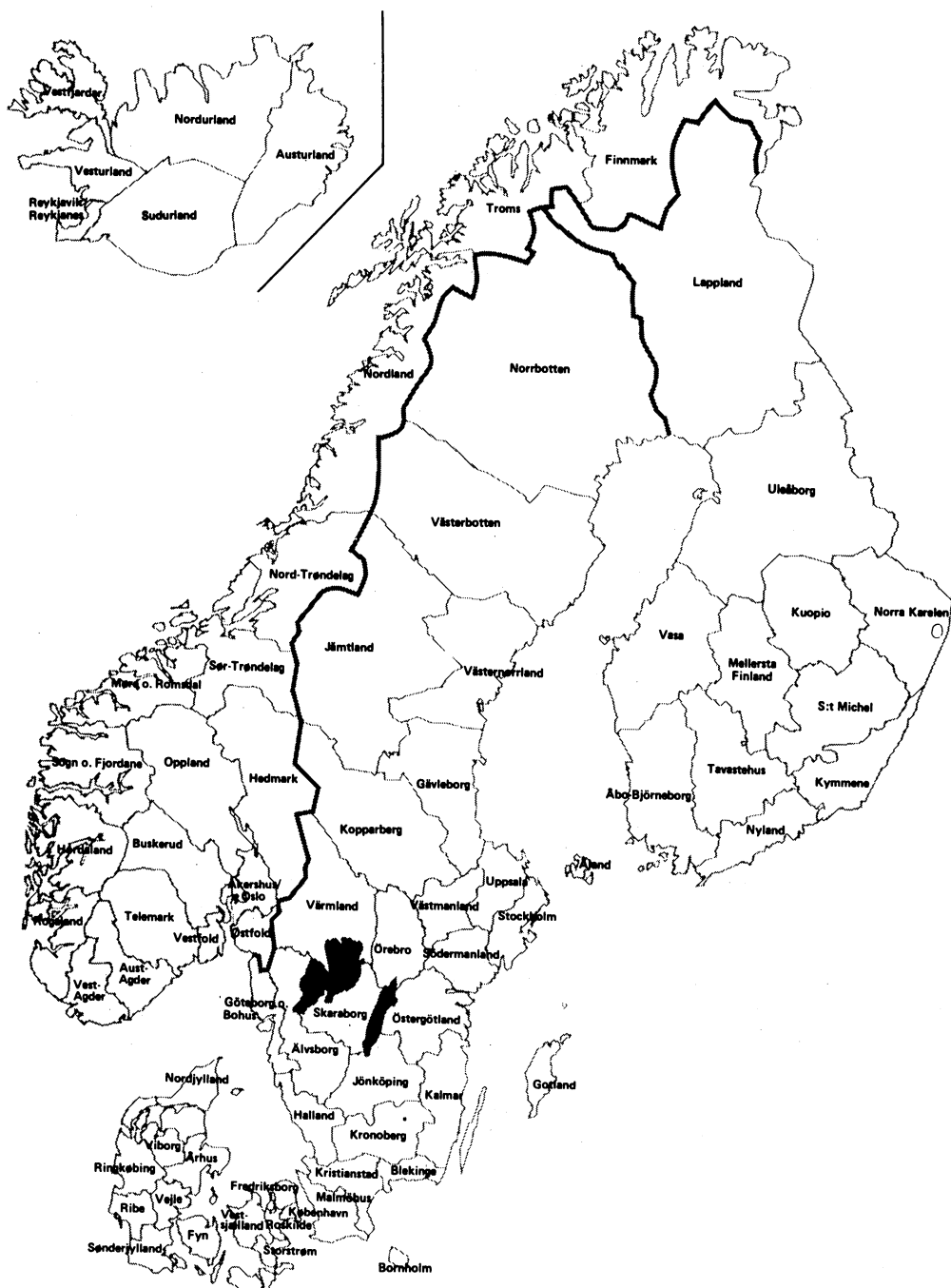
ministrative dualism is the Swedish Foreign Office, which combines ministerial responsibilities with its role as a central authority for the administration of foreign affairs.

Finland

Public administration in Finland resembles administration in Sweden to the extent that it contains independent central administrative agencies. But this system has not been as consistently implemented as in Sweden. During certain periods, as for example in the 1920s, the aim was instead to bring administrative responsibilities directly under the control of the appropriate minister. This is why large parts of the central administration of social affairs are dealt with by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The highest ranking civil servant in a ministry is known as the Permanent Under-Secretary (*kanslichef*). A Finnish minister's Political Secretary corresponds to the Under-Secretary of State in Norway and Sweden. In coalition governments what sometimes happens is that two ministers from different parties share a ministry; specific areas are then divided between them. Formerly the central administrative agencies were run by a collegiate body of the highest ranking civil servants in the ministry concerned. Apart from the collegiate agencies, there are also those run by an executive board, as well as those presided over by a director.

State Administration at Regional and Local Level

There are two forms of the organisation of administration at regional and local level. In the first of these, the ministries and central administrative agencies set up their own divisions at various locations to take charge of the unemployment exchange, the police, customs, and higher education. In the second, the country is divided into regions, all of which are under the control of a special administrative body. The latter form is of little relevance to Denmark which because of its small distances and centralised administration has been relatively easy to manage from the capital. In Sweden on the other hand, county governors (*landshövdingar*) have played an enormously important role in previous eras as part of the Crown's efforts to assert control over its wide-ranging territories. Currently the county governor, who is appointed by the Government, presides over the county administrative board, whose members



Figur 6.2 Regional indelning

are appointed by the county council. It is the county administrative board that is responsible for regional planning, environmental protection, civil defence, tax collection, the registration of births and deaths, and the police authority. Sweden is divided into 24 counties (*län*). At the head of all of the 12 counties (*lääni*) of Finland is a county governor appointed by the President. There has been much debate about replacing this system of administration by public officials with executive boards consisting of elected representatives. The Finnish counties are responsible for planning issues, environmental protection, taxes, police matters, health, and education. The regional divisions of the Nordic countries are shown in the map presented in diagram 6.1

During the 1970s regional administration was reorganised in Norway and Denmark. Central government and local authorities were separated. Norway is divided into 20 counties (*fylken*). The chief administrative officer of the county is responsible for planning and building issues, environmental protection, matters relating to family law, and civil defence. The 14 Danish *statsamt* are of little significance and are responsible mainly for matters relating to adoption, inheritance, marriage and divorce. Both the Danish *amt* and the Norwegian *fylke* are also responsible for the supervision of the local, or municipal, authorities. Iceland's 17 *sýslur* are primarily concerned with tax collection.

Local Self-Government

Nordic traditions of local self-government have a long history. The medieval *Things* at the level of the local district constituted a rudimentary form of self-government. The *Things* diminished in importance when the administration of justice was taken over by a centralised system of law courts. During the Catholic era, a degree of local popular power existed within church affairs. As time passed these church parishes were given responsibility for the care of the poor and this was to make them the early precursors of the present local authorities. In the cities the bourgeoisie developed a degree of self-government in the form of town councils, known as *byråd* in Denmark and *magistrater* in Sweden. The dividing line between private and public activity was often fluid; many public duties were dealt with as a part-time or voluntary responsibility. As part of the growth of a centralised unitary state during the sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries, local self-government was rolled back. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that the foundations of the current form of municipal authority, known throughout Scandinavia as the “commune” (*kommun*), were laid. The term “commune” also dates from this period. In Sweden and Finland the highest decision-making body was called the communal assembly, which was made up of the enfranchised inhabitants of the “commune”. This form of direct democracy worked rather poorly in practice, because participation was low and sporadic. Subsequently a representative system was introduced with the municipal authority as the highest decision-making body. The franchise for these local councils was graded in all the Nordic countries; the number of votes was in proportion to income and property. Universal and equal suffrage at local elections were introduced by the Nordic countries during the years 1908–1918.

Local self-government is constitutionally protected in every Nordic country with the exception of Norway. In the constitutions of Denmark and Iceland reference is made to the independence of the local authorities; the Finnish constitution states “that the administration of the local authorities shall be based on self-government by the citizens”; and the Swedish constitution states that the principle of government by the people also includes local self-government. During the German occupation of Norway, local self-government was abolished.

The Organisation of Local Government

The number of local authorities in the Nordic countries varies between 200 and just under 500 (table 6.2). The average population per local authority is greatest in Sweden (ca. 30,000 inhabitants) and lowest in Iceland (ca. 1,000 inhabitants). Relatively far-reaching changes were made in Sweden and in Denmark between the 1950s and the beginning of the 1970s which involved the amalgamation of the smaller local authorities. A common trend is that former differences in methods of local government between rural and town councils have subsequently diminished.

Local councils were set up as the highest decision-making body during the nineteenth century – these are known as *fullmäktige* in Sweden, in Denmark as *kommunalbestyrelse*, and in Norway as *kommunestyre*. The decision-making assembly of the local authority is nowadays appointed at universal elections. The term of office is four years with the

Table 6.2 The Division between Regional and Local Government

	<i>Local level</i>	<i>Regional level</i>
Denmark	275 kommuner	14 amtskommuner
Finland	460 kommuner/kunta	—
Iceland	213 sveitarfélög	21 syslunefnd
Norway	448 kommuner	19 fylkeskommuner
Sweden	286 kommuner	23 landsting
Åland	16 kommuner	—
The Faroes	50 kommuner	—
Greenland	18 kommuner	—

Denmark: excl. the Faroes and Greenland. Finland: incl. Åland.

exception of Sweden where local councils are elected for three years. Only in Sweden do local authority elections take place on the same day as general elections; the other Nordic states hold parliamentary and local elections on separate occasions. What Sweden, Finland, and Norway have in common as regards the organisation of local government is that there exists in parallel to the elected local assembly, a local executive committee, known in Sweden and in Finland as the *kommunstyrelse*, and in Norway as the *formannskap*. This division between “government” and “parliament”, to borrow the language of national politics, is lacking at the local level in Denmark and in Iceland (with the exception of the major Danish cities). In the majority of Danish local authorities it is the *borgmester*, or mayor, who is in charge of the executive. The system of local government committees is not highly developed in Denmark.

The local authorities have come to enjoy increasing importance in public sector provision. One measure of this is the proportion of public revenue made up by local taxation. In 1991 this proportion was 31 per cent in Denmark, 30 per cent in Sweden, 26 per cent in Finland, and 21 per cent in Norway and in Iceland. Local authorities play a more important role in the Nordic countries than they do in the rest of Europe. In a number of areas, local authorities carry out the duties of public administration, such as tax collection and the registration of births and deaths in

Denmark. The most financially demanding aspects of local authority activities are social services and education. The income of local authorities comes primarily from local taxes and government subsidies. In all the Nordic countries local autonomy is limited to the extent that the state through legislation has imposed great responsibilities on local councils and set limits and rules for the way local authorities are run. Current administrative policy is aimed at reducing the detailed regulation of local authorities by central government.

On the one hand central government sets clear financial limits for local self-government. On the other hand local authorities are being given greater autonomy in the use of their tax resources (and in making cuts to public services.)

Local Politics

The nature of local politics has changed in the course of the last few decades. Local politics have come increasingly to resemble national politics. Previously a large part of the work done by local authorities was run by local councillors on a voluntary basis, today local government administration is carried out by local government officers and experts. Professional politicians who make a career in local politics are much more common in Sweden, where they are known as municipal commissioners (*kommunalråd*). Previously party political antagonisms were relatively unusual, particularly in the smaller local authorities. The pattern of co-operation at local level could often be very different from that existing at the national level. But differences of opinion between local parties have been increasingly frequently influenced by the dividing lines of national politics. The existence of very large local authorities has made it possible for the political parties to mount independent local electoral campaigns. This has meant a reduction in the personal component of local elections, although in a system such as that operating in Denmark this is still of considerable importance because of the prominent role played by the mayor in local political life. Since the political parties have been given a more active role in contemporary political life at local level, the comprehensive amalgamation of local authorities into larger areas has meant a revitalisation of local politics. On the other hand, the development of large-scale bureaucratic administrative units has led to concern that decisions are being made at levels that are increasingly removed from the

individual citizen. This is why experiments are being made at various levels – such as the neighbourhood council and other forms of institutional reorganisation – in order to increase the influence of both the general public and elected local councillors over the running of the local authorities.

“Free-Communes”

The modernisation programs for public administration have been largely directed at the local authorities. The forms of central government control of local authorities are being re-examined. In an attempt to assess in what ways it would be possible to reduce the detailed control by the state of local authorities, various local authorities have been allowed to experiment with new organisational structures, to be exempt from special local government legislation, to avoid submitting their decisions for ratification by central government authorities, and to experiment with less restricted methods of managing state subsidies.

The first “free-communes” were introduced in Sweden in 1984. Denmark followed in 1985, Norway in 1987, and Finland in 1989. In all these countries the experiments were made on a voluntary basis by those local and regional authorities wanting to participate. These experiments can be viewed as a normal part of current strategies of reform. Centrally planned standardised solutions are being replaced by an ethos of experiment and of learning from experience. Initially these experiments met with considerable inertia. Opposition mainly came from sectorial interest groups, government ministries and administrative agencies. The “free communes” have now been generalized and made permanent. The Swedish Local Government Act of 1992 grants increased autonomy to all municipalities.

County Councils

In addition to the authorities existing at local level there also exist elected bodies at regional level. Whereas there are great similarities between the Nordic countries in relation to the organisation of the local municipalities, the differences are much greater at the regional level.

Only in Sweden, Denmark and Norway are there regional bodies that are directly elected; the system of direct elections was not introduced in

Norway until 1976. These regional councils, known as *landsting*, *amts-kommuner* and *fylkeskommuner* respectively, have wide-ranging responsibilities, mainly within the sphere of health care but also for roads in Norway and Denmark, for example. The *sýslur* of Iceland, which are of relatively little importance, are run by a board whose members are appointed by the participating primary authorities. Finland does not have county councils although the possibility of their introduction has been long discussed. However, in Finland it is usual to have groups of local authorities forming associations, in which authorities within a specific geographic area pool their resources to deal with shared responsibilities.

Although it would therefore seem that a certain degree of regional self-government does exist in the Nordic countries, this is still a long way from the federal form of governmental structures which are mainly to be found in large, heterogeneous nations. Seen in international terms, the Nordic countries consist of small unitary states combining strong national government and strong local government with rather weak regional bodies. The three autonomous areas of Åland, the Faroes and Greenland have a special status.

The Judiciary

In the Middle Ages there was little distinction drawn between the executive and the judicial powers. Gradually, however, the power of the sovereign over the administration of justice waned. In the nineteenth century under the influence of the doctrine of the separation of powers, measures were introduced to safeguard the independence of the courts from the power of the king and the Government. The independence of the judiciary was guaranteed by the implementation of two main principles. The first being that the courts could not be bound by any rules other than those imposed by law. The second was that the employment conditions of judges were subject to special protection. A judge may only be dismissed under very strict and carefully regulated conditions. In practice, judges cannot be dismissed. The constitutions of all the Nordic countries contain provisions of this kind.

The courts of law of general adjudication are organised at three levels, apart from in Iceland where there are no intermediate courts of appeal.

Table 6.3 The Courts of Law of General Adjudication

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
Supreme Court	Højesteret	Korkein oikeus	Hæstiréttur	Høyesterett	Högsta domstolen
Intermediate Courts of Appeal	Landsretter	Hovioikeus	—	Lagmansretter	Hovrätter
District Courts	Underretter	Raastuvanoikeus	Hæradsréttur	By- og herreds- retter	Tingsrätter

The system of classification for the law courts of the Nordic countries is laid out in table 6.3.

There are also a number of different kinds of court dealing with special areas of legislation, such as the Trade and Shipping Court in Denmark. In addition there exist a number of tribunals, similar to courts of law, for deciding on administrative matters. Sweden and Finland are in a special position as they have an extensive system of courts entirely devoted to administrative and tax matters, which exist in parallel to the ordinary courts of law.

What role do the courts play in the political process? The interpretation of legislation and the establishment of precedents are obviously of great importance in this respect. General legal principles are given substance by the specific content of decisions made in individual cases. The way legislation is applied is becoming increasingly important in an age when more and more legislation is being drawn up in the form of framework laws.

An issue that has been the subject of lively debate in many countries revolves around the right of the courts to refuse to implement a law or regulation they believe to be in conflict with the constitution. Most frequently this involves that part of the constitution devoted to the rights and freedoms of the citizen. There is a general consensus that the constitution takes precedence over laws of lower rank in the event of a conflict. The focus of contention has instead concerned which authority should have the right to determine that a conflict of this kind has actually occurred: the legislature, or the law courts, or a special body such as a constitutional court. In the Nordic countries the right of the courts to validate legislation has been recognised by Sweden, Denmark, Norway

and Iceland. In Sweden the right of judicial review has been part of the constitution since 1980. Finland has taken a rather different path. The constitutional character of laws is tested by a special procedure as they are being enacted, which is why the courts are not considered to constitute an additional avenue of appeal.

None of the five Nordic countries has a special constitutional court like those of Germany or France. During the 1980s, however, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg has become increasingly important, particularly in Sweden, for citizens seeking a judicial review of administrative decisions. As a consequence of criticisms made by the European Court, Sweden has introduced a system of validation for legislation which allows for appeals to be made to the Supreme Court of Administration on government decisions in administrative matters.

With the expansion of the areas covered by legislation, new types of legal cases have come into being. There is a tendency to avoid trying these cases in the ordinary law courts. Instead new forms of specialist courts have been created, such as the Rents and Tenancies Court of Appeal and the Market Court in Sweden. The members of these specialist courts are made up of professional judges as well as experts and representatives of the interest organisations concerned. The Labour Court has a special position in this regard which will be dealt with in the next chapter.

7

Organisations

One of the characteristic features of the Nordic societies is the existence of a plethora of voluntary organisations and associations. Almost every sectional interest is organised to some extent and the great majority of citizens are members of several associations. Parallel to the representative political process, these organisations have been developing into a special channel of political influence. The relationship between the state and the organised interest groups is one of mutual dependence, which takes the form of an ever more complex network of formal and informal links.

The Formation of the Organisations

There is slightly more than a hundred years of history behind the modern structure of interest organisations. Although corporate bodies existed in previous eras in the form of the Estates, the guilds, and village communities, in terms of scale and significance they are not at all comparable with present day organisations. According to one viewpoint prominent in the nineteenth century, there was no need for organisations: the individual should be able to assert his rights vis-à-vis the state with the support of the legal system. However, the freedom to form associations was never fully suppressed in any of the Nordic countries. The mobilisation brought about by the growth of the new organisations was an important precondition for the triumph of universal suffrage and the de-

velopment of the party political system. In simplified terms the organisations were formed in four different stages.

The Four Waves

The first wave, which began in the middle of the nineteenth century, came in the form of cultural protest. Various kinds of counter-culture developed in opposition to linguistic supremacy, alcoholism, and the petrified religious practices of the established churches. In Finland both Finnish and Swedish speakers formed organisations of their own. As a protest against the Dano-Norwegian (*bokmål*) that dominated urban life in Norway, adherents of the New Norwegian (*landsmål/nynorsk*) language banded together. The cultural conflict was at its most intense in Norway, where the linguistic feud largely coincided with non-conformist opposition to the established church and with the birth of the temperance movement. There were Revivalist movements in all the Nordic countries but the temperance movement was strongest in Norway, closely followed by Sweden.

The second wave in the formation of organisations took place in the economic sphere. Most of the economic interest organisations were formed at the turn of the century, although in Iceland this took place a little later. Farmers formed associations to protect their interests. This movement was not at all homogeneous. In the beginning it was usual for the owners of large farms to organise an interest group of their own, while smallholders did likewise. In Norway and Denmark this split still persists today. The development of producer cooperatives was of great importance in the primary industries. The movement for economic co-operation among farmers has been a powerful one throughout the Nordic countries, not least in Iceland where the principal interest organisations for agriculture and fisheries are of major political and social significance.

Industrialisation led to the growth of a new social class, the industrial workers. The trade unions came into being as a means for workers to assert their demands for better wages and working conditions. The trade union and political sections of the labour movement were intimately connected in the initial stages. For a short while the Norwegian Labour Party served both as a political party and as a trade union association; the same state of affairs obtained in Denmark and in Iceland. The trade

union movement was first developed in Denmark and in that country was closely linked with the guild traditions of skilled workers. Subsequently co-operation between local trade unions developed on a systematic basis and in 1898 the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions (*Landsorganisationen*, LO) was formed; similar confederations were created that same year in Sweden and in Norway a year later.

The central organisation for trade unions was set up in Finland in 1907 and in Iceland in 1916. At roughly the same time employers' organisations were established to form a united front in dealing with the union tactics of the workers. In the commercial sphere there were also special industrial associations for protecting the interests of industry, as well as organisations for skilled workers and commercial interests.

The organisation of salaried employees developed later and does not have the same uniform character as the workers' trade unions. In comparative terms Sweden has the most powerful and most centralised association of salaried employees. In Norway large sections of salaried staffs are organised within the Confederation of Trade Unions (*Landsorganisationen*). Special organisations for professionals and graduates exist in all the Nordic countries.

The third great wave of organisation can be dated to the inter-war period. This involved mainly educational and leisure organisations. In terms of the number of its members, the sporting movement has become one of the largest constituent parts of the organised society.

In recent decades a number of new associations have appeared that lack the fixed organisation and permanent character of older organisations. This fourth wave involves various campaigning and opinion-moulding groups operating both at national and local level. Major examples of this kind are the campaign against the atom bomb of the 1950s, Norwegian and Danish opposition to EEC-membership, the Swedish campaign against nuclear power, and the peace movement of the 1980s. A number of campaigning groups have been formed solely to influence the development of a single issue or to prevent the implementation of a political decision, e.g. the building of a motorway, the demolition of a building, or staff cuts at a day nursery. The main aim of other groups, such as the women's movement, is to influence public opinion in the long term. In a number of movements, such as the opposition to nuclear power, both these aims are combined. In terms of their internal structure, campaigning groups differ from the more established type of organised interest group. They often lack membership lists, detailed or-

Table 7.1 The Unionisation of Western Industrial Countries

	<i>Percentage of employees organised in trade unions 1992</i>
Sweden	84
Finland	75
Denmark	73
Norway	56
Belgium	53
Australia	47
Austria	44
Great Britain	39
Canada	37
Italy	34
Germany	32
Switzerland	28
Netherlands	25
Japan	24
USA	16
Spain	16
France	10

Source: Anders Kjellberg, Department of Sociology, University of Lund

organisational rules, and management structures. A hierarchical representational structure is frequently being replaced by large public meetings and a network of local groups.

Public bodies can also take on the role of interest groups. Both local and regional authorities have formed national associations which have developed into powerful groups for exerting pressure on the state. Individual local authorities may also act as independent political agents on issues such as industrial policy and regional development. It is possible to discern a tendency towards the development of a form of "local corporatism", in which local politicians, officials, trade unions, companies, and interest organisations collaborate in defence of their own district.

Labour Market Organisations

Many of the decisions affecting private citizens are made by private organisations. This is particularly true of conditions obtaining in the economic sphere. Employee and employer organisations have been shaped

in large measure by the regulatory system of negotiations and agreements that apply in the labour market.

The degree of trade union organisation in the Nordic countries is very high in international terms (table 7.1). Although this is somewhat less true of Norway than of Sweden, Denmark, and Finland. The proportion of members has also tended to go down in recent years, although not as markedly as in a number of other Western countries.

Seen in the longer term, the most important change to the internal structures of the organisations operating in the labour market is the considerable extent of centralisation. Broad agreements on the redistribution of the economic surplus have necessitated decisions being taken at the centre that have been at the cost of the independence of local trade unions. This trend has not developed to the same extent in all the Nordic countries. The trade union movement is most powerfully centralised in Sweden. In Norway too the Confederation of Trade Unions is very powerful but the opportunities for the membership to vote on accepting or refusing proposed agreements have for the most part been retained. Balloting of members had largely disappeared in Sweden by the 1940s. As in Norway the Danish trade union movement has largely retained the ballot system although the movement has a much less uniform character when compared with those in both Sweden and Norway.

Whereas the general trend has meant that trade unions have been organised according to the industrial sector principle (everyone working for a company belongs to the same union), the "trade" or occupational union still remains strong in Denmark and this also applies to the salaried employees' movement. Traditions dating from the time of the guilds are still alive today in the clear distinction drawn between skilled and unskilled workers; the latter are organised in the vast National Union of General Workers. The Finnish trade union movement has been more divided but its splits have mostly followed party political lines. Communists and Social Democrats have vied with each other for power, and certain periods have seen the existence of two competing central trade union organisations. With the reduction of Communist influence, the Finnish trade union movement has come to resemble more closely those in Scandinavia.

The system of collective membership of trade unionists in the Social Democratic party was retained longest in Norway and Sweden, but has now been abolished.

The trade union movement in Iceland is the most divided in party po-

litical terms. The People's Alliance and the Independence Party have had the greatest influence on the unions, with the Social Democrats coming third. In relative terms the Icelandic central trade union organisation is in a weak position. Recently there has been a tendency in the other Nordic countries as well for the position of individual unions to grow more powerful at the cost of the central organisation.

Settling Labour Market Disputes

The rules for settling disputes in the labour market have largely been created by the protagonists themselves. Agreements made between employer and employee organisations have guaranteed the workers' right to form organisations, regulated the use of strikes and other forms of industrial action, as well as instituted a general procedure for the settlement of conflicts. Principal agreements of this kind were reached in 1899 in Denmark, in Norway in 1935, in Sweden in 1938, and in 1946 in Finland.

The Labour Court is not part of the general system of law courts; its decisions may not be appealed to higher courts. All the Nordic countries have passed legislation on government arbitration which can be invoked in the case of labour market disputes. The role of the government mediation service is most strongly entrenched in Denmark and Norway. The government arbitrator, as is the case in Finland as well, is empowered to defer industrial action for a certain period. The state also has the power to intervene in other ways to settle labour disputes, by legislation, for example. This option has been made most use of in Denmark and Norway.

Wage-Negotiations

None of these countries fully applies the principle of "the right to negotiate freely", i.e. that only the protagonists should determine the conditions operating in the labour market, free from the intervention of public authorities. In all these countries, including Sweden, where this right is frequently invoked, political institutions play a more or less decisive role in the resolution of wage disputes. The involvement of political institutions in the last few years seems to have increased rather than dimin-

ished. This is partly because conflicts of interest have intensified in a period of economic recession, and partly because political decisions on taxes and social benefits have had an increasingly significant effect on wage trends in real terms.

There have been a number of occasions in Denmark when the labour market protagonists have failed to agree on binding agreements. The centralised bargaining system broke down in the 1970s. The Government intervened a number of times by introducing compulsory legislation which meant that arbitration proposals were given the force of law. During the 1980s wages were fixed either by decentralised negotiations or by legislation.

From the beginning of the 1980s, the collective agreements made in Norway have been replaced by negotiations on the part of each union, often in combination with mandatory government measures. The main method employed by the Norwegian government has been binding arbitration. One example of the setting aside of the right of free negotiation was the incomes policy legislation pushed through in 1988 which meant wage rises were limited to 5 per cent.

Since 1968 central negotiations in Finland have been linked to broad agreements affecting not only wages but prices, taxes, and policies on employment, housing, and social affairs. These co-ordinated package deals have, however, become increasingly difficult to push through. Competition between the unions, the opposition of employers, and the Government's difficulties in keeping to agreements have all been advanced as causes of the problems of the Finnish system.

Iceland provides an example of close links between the state and the labour market organisations. On a number of occasions, as in 1986 and 1990, it proved possible to conclude tripartite agreements between the Government, the employers, and the employees. On other occasions, in 1983 for example, the Government overrode the right to negotiate freely and intervened with compulsory legislation to reduce wages and so attempt to cut inflation. The system has led to a great deal of friction and increased the gap between the political and trade union wings of the labour movement.

Sweden adopted centralised wage negotiations between 1956 and 1981. There is opposition in Sweden to the idea of incomes policy and binding government intervention. Legislation has only been used on a single occasion, during the strike by professional employees in 1971. The Government has attempted to influence wage trends by other

means, although this has had limited results. The divisions between the trade union organisations, the opposition of the employers to centralised wage negotiation, decentralisation, as well as local wage drift have all contributed to the current state of affairs in which wage settlements are controlled neither by the central organisations nor by the state.

Co-determination

The trend towards industrial democracy and co-determination has followed a course all its own in the Nordic countries. This system evolved as a development of the negotiating system and gave the trade union organisations a central role. The Nordic model for co-determination is not aimed primarily at enabling individual employees to assert their rights by means of legislation. Instead, the influence of the workers is to be exercised mainly by the trade union organisations in the workplace. It is in Sweden that this model has been implemented to the greatest extent. The right to co-determination belongs to the local trade union and not to the individual.

The Nordic model for co-determination at work is now being challenged by the process of European integration. The model of the European countries is less collectivist and more oriented to the individual. Instead of collective agreements and co-operative procedures, the emphasis is on basic rights and legal regulation. In the course of Denmark's membership of the European Community and the European Union, the Danish trade union movement has come to place increased importance on European regulations and legislation. The changes taking place in the other Nordic countries also mean that co-determination along with collective rights are being based to an increasing extent on the rights of individuals.

The Political Role of the Organisations

When the Nordic countries are described as comprehensively organised, this applies not only to the scale of union membership, but also and perhaps above all to the ability of the major sectional interest groups to influence the political process. The ways in which organisations can exert political influence are many and varied.

The Routes to Influence

A prerequisite for a political solution being found to a social problem is that it should first be given a public airing, find its way onto the political "agenda", and then be made the subject of considered debate. In this initial political phase, the organisations play a major role by drawing attention to various interested social groups and their requirements. This can be done in a wide variety of ways: lobbying, formal and informal contacts with public authorities, the moulding of public opinion, etc. Already at this stage organised interest groups have the upper hand. Their agenda-setting power allows them to direct the political apparatus to apply itself to their particular concerns. The disadvantage of this mechanism is that the silence of those not so organised condemns the state to inactivity in other areas.

The state has developed its own system for gathering and collating information and making proposals for new or amended legislation. This involves a system of official commissions of inquiry which are, formally at least, purely consultative, but which have in many cases proved to be the forum in which compromises are reached and political guidelines arrived at. In all the Nordic countries, the committee system has become an important channel for the influence of the interest organisations.

A number of organisations are more frequently represented than others. There is a particularly large concentration on the economic interest associations. At the beginning of the 1970s, trade union organisations together with employer federations and other industrial and commercial organisations were awarded over 80 per cent of the total allocation of seats for organisations on committees in Norway. The remaining places were shared out between representatives of social, scientific, cultural, and religious interest groups, as well as youth and recreational organisations. Although women are still under-represented in almost all sections of political life, research data from Norway shows that male dominance is particularly pronounced among representatives of the organised interest groups in major areas such as industry, the labour market, and agriculture.

Organisations without their own representative on a commission of inquiry also have the opportunity to make known their views on its proposals. Commissions of inquiry frequently become the subject of a process of referral. Besides being sent to the authorities concerned, the proposals are usually referred to organisations presumed to be affected or to have an interest at stake. In Sweden this referral procedure has been in-

stitutionalised, whereas the other Nordic countries use less formal procedures.

Besides the system of inquiries and referrals there are a large number of opportunities for an organisation to put forward its views and proposals through its links to public officials and politicians while a particular matter is subject to the political process. The trade union movements in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark enjoy special consideration because of their close collaboration with the Social Democratic parties. At the central level, the scale of the personal link between trade union duties and party membership is as good as total. The possibility of appealing to parliament, and particularly to its committees, remains open to all organisations, but Norwegian research has shown that organisations more frequently develop links with civil servants than with party politicians.

Organisations are sometimes represented directly on the decision-making bodies of public authorities. This has come about in tandem with changes to public administration as part of the trend away from authorities governed exclusively by public officials and towards a system in which laymen and those social interest groups concerned are also integrated. The system of lay boards has been justified partly by democratic arguments (it involves an increase in public scrutiny and a check on bureaucracy) and partly for reasons of efficiency (the authorities are guaranteed outside expertise and links within their field of operations). As is the case in the committee system, the interest organisations' contribution to lay councils is dominated by representatives of the trade union organisations and from industry and commerce. In Denmark and Norway, representatives of the organised interest groups have mainly served on the various advisory councils and tribunals that came into being during the decades of the expansion of the public sector.

The organisations have also been drawn into the affairs of government as they have taken over purely administrative responsibilities. The collaboration between the state and the organisations flourished notably during both world wars. Many of these wartime arrangements were subsequently phased out but several of them have survived. The role of the organisations as organs of the administration is particularly prevalent in the primary industrial sector. For example, agricultural organisations have been in charge of large parts of the regulation of prices in Sweden. In Norway and Iceland, regulation of the fishing industry has been transferred to the organisations involved.

Table 7.2 Corporatism in the Western Industrialised Countries*Ranking in order of greatest degree of corporatism*

1	Norway
2	Sweden
3	Austria
4	Netherlands
5	Belgium
5	Finland
7	Denmark
8	Switzerland
9	Germany
10	France
11	Ireland
12	Italy
13	Canada
14	Great Britain
15	USA

Source: Wilson 1990

If these opportunities for exerting political influence should prove inadequate, several of the major economic interest organisations are so powerful nowadays that they could in theory force a decision to be made, or prevent one being implemented, by means of strikes, lock-outs, blockades, or the threat of using such measures. This potential power of veto on the part of the organisations has rarely been used in the Nordic countries. The political influence of the organised interest groups has been brought to bear mainly in non-disruptive and institutionalised forms.

Corporatism

This interpenetration of the state and the organisations is often referred to by the term *corporatism*. There are a relatively large number of definitions for this term, but in the literature of the social sciences corporatism is usually used to describe a particular form of collaboration between the state and the special-interest organisations. The system is predicated on the existence of powerful, centralised organisations. Instead of the pluralist concept of a large number of competing groups, there is only

one organisation for every interest group, and it is accorded a privileged position by the state. In a corporatist system the organisations are given a form of monopoly of representation. Various researchers have attempted to assess the degree of corporatism in the Western industrial countries. The results are not completely uniform, but there is a significant degree of unanimity about the main features. Table 7.2 provides an average of the rankings produced by a number of different studies (Wilson 1990). These evaluations were based on observations from the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s.

From this comparative perspective, Norway and Sweden are shown to be the two countries with the greatest degree of resemblance to a prototypical corporatist society. Austria, the Netherlands and Belgium are also usually described as corporatist, and this is normally true of Finland as well, whereas Denmark's corporatist characteristics are considered less pronounced.

It is hardly surprising in this context that the debate about the political role of the interest organisations has been most vociferous in Sweden and Norway. The Scandinavian countries provide a wealth of experience and information on the consequences of corporatism. The significance of the organisations in political life can be looked at from three points of view: from that of the state, from that of the organisations, and from the point of view of the citizen. Corporatism has proved to have advantages as well as disadvantages.

The attitude of the state to the interest organisations has varied in the course of the twentieth century. At the outset there was a great degree of scepticism and the state frequently intervened to frustrate the aims of the organisations. After various attempts to tame and regulate voluntary associations, the attitude of the state changed. The organisations gained in stability and were able to establish themselves. The state discovered that it could exploit them for use in the public services. There are even examples of organisations that have come into existence at least in part as a result of the state's initiative. By involving the interest organisations at various stages of the decision-making process, expertise and informed comment could be obtained that could otherwise only have been gained with great difficulty by even the most developed bureaucracy. Apart from being able to increase state efficiency at low cost, there was a further reason for allowing the organisations to participate in the development of policy. The system allowed the state to tie the hands of all the special interests at an early stage and to co-opt potential opposition

groups, which made the implementation of the necessary political measures that much easier.

One disadvantage from the point of view of the democratic *state* is that the powerful influence of the organisations reduces the significance of parliament. The observation was already being made by the middle of the 1960s that corporatist channels had in many instances become more important than those of parliament. "Votes count, but resources decide" as Stein Rokkan formulated the matter (1966). The influence of the organisations has meant that the real decisions are not being made by the people's elected representatives, but in committees and by administrative bodies, or in the process of negotiation.

The advantages from the point of view of the *organisations* were obvious: proximity to the centres of decision-making power increased the opportunities for promoting special interests. But it was not at all self-evident that the organisations themselves had everything to gain by obtaining the greatest possible state representation. To begin with, the organisations were very concerned to protect their independence. They defended themselves against the encroachment of the state in their internal affairs and they were reluctant to get drawn into public administration. In an analysis of the Norwegian interest organisations' relations with the state, Johan P. Olsen (1983) distinguishes a number of factors that militate against a more wide-ranging involvement on their part. The organisations are forced to make commitments and take on responsibilities which compromise both their impartiality and their freedom of action. Those organisations that make a large number of compromises face an increased loss of ideological purity. And organisations that are heavily involved at the level of national politics are also forced to set up central bodies with significant administrative resources; they risk losing their original identity as "popular movements".

The interpenetration of the state and the interest organisations has both advantages and disadvantages for the *individual citizen* as well. The organisations have, historically speaking, been very significant for the bringing together of various population groups to support common demands and for mobilising citizens to participate actively in society. The "popular movements" and the associational ethos have been described as a school in democracy. The organisations have constituted an additional channel, alongside the one offered by parliamentary democracy, for asserting special interests and influencing policy. This has meant, however, that those citizens who find themselves outside the or-

ganisations lack this opportunity to exert influence. The intertwining of private and public bodies can also bring with it problems for the members of the organisations themselves. The centralisation of the major organisations has provided them with greater external power, but this has happened at the cost to some extent of the control exercised by individual members over their own organisation.

Decorporatisation

When researchers began to discuss the subject of corporatism during the 1970s, its positive aspects were in the foreground. It appeared that an effective and adaptable system for the representation of interest groups had been developed. Large sections of the population could in this way have an impact on the political decision-making process. Other forms of political action had become superfluous. Interest groups no longer needed to seek to influence party leaders, or involve themselves in lobbying or influencing organisations. Methods for bringing pressure to bear, such as demonstrations and political strikes, were no longer simply unnecessary, they might actually threaten the harmony and spirit of consensus that was the very essence of the corporatist process.

Corporatism can be seen as a form of regulated participation. Only certain organisations are given access to the decision-making arena. Only certain forms of political participation are considered acceptable. The bedrock of the system is the authority of the leadership of the organisations. The membership is kept under discipline. In a period when the political systems of the democracies were under threat of collapse from the pressure of an ever growing number of increasingly diversified demands, corporatism promised a possible way out.

Scandinavian politics during the 1980s can to a large extent be seen as a reaction to the increasingly perceived disadvantages of the corporatist system. These had been perceived at every level, both by the state, the organisations, and the general public. The influence of the organisations proved to have been gained to no little degree at the cost of that of elected politicians. The development of policy had come to be determined by powerful interest groups rather than by political judgements made for society as a whole. The state was being reduced to just one political player among a number of others. Politicians found themselves ham-strung by rising demands and a simultaneous loss of influence. The outcome

was a weakening of their legitimacy. Efforts to reassert the supremacy of politicians took the form of various attempts to assert "general interests" over the "special interests" of the organisations.

These efforts can be summarised under the headings of *reparliamentarisation* and *decorporatisation*. Various major and more recent political areas of concern have not been organised on the lines of the corporatist model. In areas such as the environment, Norwegian oil policy, immigration policy, and equal opportunities, the interest organisations have played a very different role from that of a purely corporatist system.

From the point of view of the organisations the reaction has been obvious as well. The established interest organisations that were brought into the official decision-making process have encountered major problems. It has proved increasingly difficult to keep together encompassing and heterogeneous organisations. The legitimacy of the leadership of the organisations and their room for manoeuvre have diminished. Those interest groups that have remained outside the corporatist system have chosen other ways to influence politicians. Demonstrations, opinion moulding, and various actions to bring pressure to bear have become more important. Comparative analyses suggest that the growth of new social movements and new minor parties has been particularly strong in precisely those countries that were the most corporatist. Changes among the citizenry have also had consequences for the system of organisations. New kinds of issues and demands that characterise the problems of the post-industrial society have proven more difficult to channel in a system based on the conflicting interests and forms of organisation of industrial society. Social involvement on the part of members of the general public has been searching for new avenues of approach. The membership base of the established organisations has been weakened.

There are a number of additional external signs that the corporatist system is losing its grip. By the beginning of the 1980s, the then Conservative government of Norway had already started a process of decorporatisation of the public sector. In Sweden a commission of inquiry had come to the same kind of conclusions, but the legislation that was actually introduced was less far-reaching, due to a large extent to the opposition of the trade union organisations. Divisions between the Social Democratic Party and the Confederation of Trade Unions in Sweden during the second half of the 1980s intensified further the conflict between general and special interests. After long discussion, the Swedish

Employers' Confederation decided in 1991 to cease to be represented on almost all public bodies, committees and councils. During the 1980s, the importance of the committee system as a forum for reaching compromises and decisions diminished; the number of commissions of inquiry has been reduced little by little.

Comparatively speaking, the Nordic countries still have large and powerful interest organisations. But the kind of corporatist system that was seen for some time as a characteristic feature of the social systems of the Nordic model was at its peak over a decade ago. This system proved effective only during that specific period which saw an expansion of the public sector, relatively few and homogeneous interest groups, and a highly centralised organisation of society. When these conditions no longer applied, this system proved too rigid and too inflexible.

8

Opinion Formation

This chapter deals with three aspects of the opinion forming process in the Nordic countries. In modern societies the *mass media* serve as the public's main source of information on politics. The structure of the mass media and the political role of the mass media will be considered. The second area to be looked at concerns *electoral campaigns* and their importance in providing an opportunity for the public to keep a check on the exercise of political power. A third section will discuss the form of direct expression of opinion permitted under the constitution, namely *popular referenda*.

The Mass Media

The expansion of the mass media developed along largely parallel lines in the Nordic countries. The latter half of the eighteenth and the first part of the nineteenth centuries witnessed a protracted struggle for the right to publish newspapers free from intervention and censorship by the authorities. Freedom of the press had become a reality by the middle of the nineteenth century in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland; in Finland this development had to wait for another fifty years as a result of Russian influence. By the end of the nineteenth century several daily newspapers of the kind we know today had been founded, most of them with liberal leanings. The social and political transformation of the coming decades, in the form of the development of organised interest groups and of political parties, was closely connected with the major changes to

the structure of political communication. New newspapers were being started all the time and their combined readership increased greatly. Nearly all these newspapers shared a particular characteristic: they were published by, or had some close personal connection with, one of the political parties. This close bond between the press and the parties was more pronounced in the Nordic countries than elsewhere. It would be difficult to over-emphasize the importance of the party press for the party system in the initial stages of its foundation. The local newspaper served, particularly for the Socialist parties, as both organiser and propagandist. The newspaper became a rallying point and political signpost, the most important conduit between the party and its followers.

The establishment of the party press had been largely completed by 1920. By then there were frequently, even in smaller communities, four or five competing newspapers, supporting different parties. Since then many of the smaller newspapers have been forced out of business. The newspaper market has been subject to a process of concentration in all the Nordic countries. The various systems of press subsidy that were introduced during the 1960s – these were most extensive in Sweden, least so in Denmark – have delayed this development but not been able to reverse it. At present the press is most concentrated in Denmark and least so in Norway. Denmark has seen the growth of a large number of free local newspapers, known as “district papers”. Despite their small populations, the press is very much alive in the Faroes, Greenland, and Åland. This is particularly true of the Faroes where the newspapers play a major role in strengthening domestic social and political life.

Statistics concerning the reading of daily newspapers show the Nordic countries to have the highest readership figures in the world. If the total number of copies is counted per inhabitant then Norway comes first (594 copies per inhabitant, 1991) followed by Finland (552), Sweden (517), Iceland (ca 500), and Denmark (359). Approximately 80 per cent of a newspaper edition is accounted for by regular subscribers, while the remaining fifth is sold as single copies.

Radio broadcasts, which began in the 1920s, were brought under state control throughout the Nordic countries but a considerable degree of freedom was given to the broadcasting companies. The direct political significance of radio was not very marked at first. The programs were mainly intended to provide entertainment, culture and lectures. Journalistic coverage of current events and party political debates did not become the rule until after the Second World War. Television was

organised along the same lines as radio. Regular transmissions started in Denmark in 1954, in Sweden in 1956, in Finland in 1958, in Norway in 1960, and in Iceland in 1966.

Four Stages

The development of the mass media in the Nordic countries during the twentieth century can be divided into four phases. The first phase can be seen in terms of the struggle by liberal forces for freedom of the press. The second marks the period of expansion of the party press. The number of newspaper publishers was very large. Newspapers were often firmly anchored in a particular political and social group. The third phase is characterised by a concentration of the press. Newspapers became fewer and larger. The party press stagnated and lost some of its special identity: loyal party newspapers were reduced in number, and in the newsroom they were edited increasingly on professional journalistic principles rather than on party political lines. First radio and then television became increasingly important sources of information. This third phase, which reached its peak during the 1960s and 1970s, meant that a comparatively small number of major unitary broadcasters dominated the transmission of news and political communication. The fourth phase, that of electronic fragmentation, is still in its infancy. The monopolies of radio and television are being broken up. Regional and local radio stations are being established. Satellite television has introduced increased competition for the national television companies. Cable television provides the technical capacity to receive hundreds of program channels. Text television, teledata, and data banks offer new routes to information. At this stage we can only guess at the consequences of the fourth phase, but what does seem clear is that political mass communication will become less homogeneous and more fragmented and differentiated.

Mass Media Policy

Given the central role of television in the modern information society it is hardly surprising that the issue of who controls television has become an important political battleground. Many interested parties have

sought to stake a claim to influence the structure of broadcasting and the content of programs. For many years the public in the Nordic countries had only a single publicly-managed television channel available. Only in border areas was it possible to receive transmissions from neighbouring countries.

This situation has been dramatically changed by the advent of cable and satellite television and financing through advertising. These changes have led to political conflicts. The media policies of the various Nordic countries contain points of similarity as well as differences.

The Danish Broadcasting Service (*Danmarks Radio*) is an independent public institution financed by licence fees. The Danish Broadcasting Service runs a nationwide television channel as well as national and regional radio programs. During the 1980s the monopoly enjoyed by the corporation was broken. A nationwide channel, TV2, financed by advertising and with its headquarters in Odense, was started in 1988.

Finland differs from the other Nordic countries to the extent that commercial television, in the form of the *MTV* company, was already operating by the end of the 1950s. Revenues from this company contributed to financing the development of public television which is otherwise financed by licence fees and run by Finnish Broadcasting (*YLE*). Until now both *YLE* and *MTV* have transmitted their programs on the TV1 and TV2 channels. From 1993 *YLE* has sole use of these channels while *MTV* was given access to an enlarged Channel Three, which was originally started in 1986. A fourth channel, started in 1988, broadcasts programs in Swedish from Sweden's two channels.

Icelandic television resembled that of the rest of the Nordic countries until 1986; a public institution had the monopoly. This situation was altered in that year when private radio and television were permitted. Channel Two which started broadcasting in 1986 is mainly financed by fees from receivers. The new channel soon had by and large as many viewers as public television. A second commercial channel started in 1992.

The Norwegian Broadcasting Service (*Norsk Rikskringkasting*) has long been the dominant player in Norwegian television as it has the only nationwide television channel and is financed by licence fees. In 1991 a new nationwide, privately-owned channel financed by advertising was created. The conditions of its franchise mean that the new channel is to be based on the principle of public service, that a news service must be established, and that both programs in Norwegian and the regional pro-

duction of programs should be promoted. The new TV2 channel has its headquarters in Bergen.

Although the Swedish radio and television monopoly was formally dismantled at the end of the 1970s, it was not until 1991 that a privately-owned channel, TV4, financed by advertising, was permitted to start transmission via the nationwide, terrestrial network of transmitters. In the interval, several commercial channels had managed to establish themselves through satellite transmissions. The privately-owned Scan Sat/TV3 had already started transmitting in 1988 and even then had established a Nordic profile; it has the widest coverage in Sweden and Norway. The 1991 decision means that the Swedish Broadcasting Service will continue to transmit its two channels, Channel One and TV2, without advertising.

Both the Faroes and Greenland now have their own television channels. The new legislation on self-government means that Åland has been given the power to decide on its own radio and television operations.

The attempts to create Nordic co-operation on satellite television have failed. Since 1959 there has, however, existed a forum for co-operation through Nordic Vision (*Nordvision*) which concentrates mainly on joint production and program exchanges. The Nordic Film and Television Fund, started in 1990, is intended to promote the production of audio-visual works in the Nordic countries and to support the dissemination of Nordic productions throughout the Nordic countries.

The Political Role of the Mass Media

The issue, then, is to what extent the mass media influence the political decision-making process. Examples can, of course, be found where documentary features and journalistic revelations have brought facts to light which have had a direct bearing on the way a particular political issue is handled. But the independent importance of the mass media in this respect should not be exaggerated. It is generally the case that the opportunities for exerting political influence are greatest in the initial stages of the handling of an issue, before all the alternatives have been formulated and final positions adopted. The Norwegian Study of Power and Democracy showed that the mass media usually concentrate on the final stages of the political decision-making process. The same study also suggested that the influence of the mass media can be indirect. In sit-

uations in which the normal political channels are inadequate, the media can serve as a complementary forum. In deadlocked situations and in the course of delicate negotiations, one of the protagonists may be able to create new openings and put pressure on the opponents by means of leaks to the media. The development of more dynamic journalism has contributed to the present state of affairs in which the political process in all the Nordic countries operates under rather different conditions than obtained a few decades ago. Politics is interpreted in journalistic terms; complicated contexts are broken down into dramatic simplifications; lightning exposés replace continuous scrutiny. This development could be clearly seen in a study of Danish electoral campaigns. The latest events and political manoeuvring predominated at the cost of a more long-term look at the future. Journalistic criteria have gained a foothold in politics.

The significance of the media lies not least in its capacity to determine who has access to the public agenda. It is of crucial importance for new minor parties to gain access to media coverage and so reach the electors. Where the electoral system imposes a formal cut-off point, the media create a real cut-off point in the opinion-moulding process. The Nordic countries, Denmark in particular, have rules that make it comparatively easy for minor parties to participate in election coverage. This is one of the explanations put forward for the the success of new parties and the increasing political fragmentation of parliament.

Electoral Campaigns

In representative democracies, the process of moulding public opinion that precedes elections is of vital significance in determining the capacity of the public to keep a check on the exercise of political power. One study posed the following question: Can Nordic electoral campaigns be seen as repetitive rituals of minor importance in determining the outcome of elections, or do they embody a broad commitment to a collective decision-making process of great importance for the outcome of the election and the future political direction of the country? The study was structured around a comparison between Denmark, Norway and Sweden based on the interview surveys that are nowadays usually carried

out in tandem with parliamentary elections (Asp, Esaiasson & Hedberg 1987).

The survey considered the issue from two aspects. The first question concerned the significance of the campaign for the election result. Had the scope for influencing the result increased or decreased? The second question related to the electoral campaign as a mass communication process. Had the public's involvement and participation in the electoral campaign increased or decreased?

The response to the first question was relatively uniform. The electoral campaign had become increasingly important in determining the outcome of elections. Four factors were found to be particularly significant. The proportion of those switching their vote had increased. The proportion of voters with strong party identification had gone down. Class voting had decreased, issue voting had increased. Voters were making up their minds closer and closer to voting day. Sweden was the country where the scope for influencing the result had increased most.

The electoral campaign as a communications exercise can take three different forms. The communication activities of members of the public themselves may mean that the individual voter takes part in political discussions, and that the individual voter tries to influence others prior to the election. The second form is that of interpersonal communication, with other people as intermediaries. The third method is gaining information from the mass media.

Nordic citizens take a more active part in political discussions and attempt to a greater degree to win votes than they did a few decades ago. This applies to all three countries and over time this trend can be seen to have followed the same pattern in all of them.

Over time the degree of exposure of electors to other persons has shown little variation. The traditional method employed by political parties of getting in touch with voters through electoral meetings and knocking on doors plays a limited role in communication terms. Discussions with family, friends, and colleagues remain unchanged at a high level.

The most important change in relation to the public's awareness of the electoral campaign is the increased role played by television. A very large proportion of the population regularly follow television news reports. The importance of daily newspapers and the printed electoral material produced by the parties seems not to have been changed by the in-

roduction of television; on the other hand the relative importance of radio has diminished.

This means that electoral campaigns as communication processes are equally important in the countries studied and that their importance has been increasing over time.

The electoral campaigns of a few decades ago played in relative terms a less significant role in deciding the outcome of the election, and the public was less involved in the electoral campaign. The nature of electoral campaigns has altered in the same direction in all the countries. The scope for influencing the result has increased; the electoral campaign has gained greater importance in determining the outcome of the elections. The public is more actively involved in politics and makes more independent decisions. In the case of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s seems to have been a particularly important watershed in this respect. The increased professionalism of journalists and the weakening of the party press have increased the independence of the mass media. The study of Nordic electoral campaigns arrived at the conclusion that the political parties are no longer the sole protagonists as they have gained a competitor in the form of the mass media, acting as an independent agent.

Popular Referenda

Although the constitutions of the Nordic states are based essentially on the principles of representative democracy, they also contain an element of direct democracy in the form of popular referenda. Referenda are an institutionalised way of allowing the views of the public to be expressed directly. Among the various types of referenda it is customary to distinguish between consultative and decisive referenda. Another form of classification looks at referenda in terms of how they originate, whether they are the result of a constitutional requirement that a referendum be held in certain instances (mandatory), or, if no such obligation exists, they are voluntary (optional). A distinction is also made between the referendum proper which involves a decision or proposal put by parliament to the people, and the popular initiative, whereby a proposition can be made the subject of a popular vote if it gains the support of a

Table 8.1 Popular Referenda

			Proportion of Yes-votes %	Level of Participation %
Denmark	1916	Sale of the West Indian Islands	64.2	37.4
	1920	Constitutional Amendment: North Schleswig	96.9	49.6
	1939	Constitutional Amendment: Lowering of the Voting Age, Abolition of County Councils	91.9	48.9
	1953	a. New Constitution	78.8	59.1
		b. Lowering of the Voting Age from 25 to 23 or 21	54.6	57.1
	1961	Lowering of the Voting Age from 23 to 21	55.0	37.3
	1963	a. Approval of the Law on the Acquisition of Land	38.4	73.0
		b. Approval of the Law on Smallholdings	38.6	73.0
		c. Approval of the Law on Municipal Land Control	39.6	73.0
		d. Approval of the Law on the Protection of Nature	42.6	73.0
	1969	Lowering of the Voting Age from 21 to 18	21.4	63.6
	1971	Lowering of the Voting Age from 21 to 20	56.5	86.2
	1972	Membership of the European Community	63.3	90.1
	1978	Lowering of the Voting Age from 20 to 18	53.8	63.2
	1986	Approval of the Single Market	56.2	75.4
Finland	1992	Approval of the Maastricht Treaty	49.3	82.9
	1993	Approval of the Maastricht Treaty after exceptions for Denmark	57.0	85.5
	1931	Abolition of Prohibition	70.5	44.4
Iceland	1908	Introduction of Prohibition	60.1	69.2
	1916	Civil Defence	7.2	49.2
	1918	Union with Denmark	92.6	43.8
	1933	Abolition of Prohibition	57.7	45.3
	1944	a. Independence from Denmark	99.5	98.4
		b. Institution of the Republic	98.5	98.4
Norway	1905	Dissolution of Union with Sweden	99.9	84.8
	1905	Approval of the King	78.9	75.3
	1919	Retention of Prohibition	61.6	66.5
	1926	Abolition of Prohibition	55.8	64.8
	1972	Membership of the European Community	46.5	77.6
Sweden	1922	Introduction of Prohibition	49.0	55.1
	1955	Driving on the Right	15.5	53.2
	1957	Supplementary Pensions		72.4
		Option 1	45.8	
		Option 2	15.0	
		Option 3	35.3	
	1980	Nuclear Power		75.6
		Option 1	18.9	
		Option 2	39.1	
		Option 3	38.7	
The Faroes	1946	Independence from Denmark (unofficial)	50.1	66.4
Greenland	1979	Introduction of Home Rule	73.1	63.3
	1982	Continued Membership of the European Community	46.1	74.9

number of members of the public, as in Switzerland and some of the states of the USA, for example.

The optional consultative referendum, in which the parliamentary majority decides to listen to the views of the people on an issue without agreeing to be bound by the result, is a relatively weak form of direct democracy. In practice it is possible to hold this kind of referendum in all the Nordic countries. The Sweden constitution contains a clause on the holding of consultative referenda. A comparable clause has now been added in Finland; however, the idea of permitting popular initiatives, under which 100,000 citizens would be able to force the holding of a referendum, has been turned down. Consultative referenda were held between 1919 and 1933 in all the Nordic countries, with the exception of Denmark, to clarify the people's verdict on the prohibition of alcohol.

The institution of the referendum is most fully developed in Denmark. Referenda had been made mandatory by 1915 in the case of proposed amendments to the constitution. From a comparative perspective the rules for changes to the constitution in Denmark are relatively strict. In order to alter the constitution the requirement is for two identical decisions by the *Folketing* to be made with an election intervening, combined with the approval of the Government, and that the measure be approved by a majority of the votes in a special referendum – that majority must constitute at least 40 per cent of the electorate. The idea behind this, that the people themselves should determine the forms of political government, constitutes a deliberate exception to the principles of representative democracy. The rules are so constituted that any elector not using his vote is deemed to have voted against the proposal. As the electors have proved to be relatively uninterested in constitutional issues, there have been five occasions on which it has proved difficult to get a sufficient number of voters to vote “yes”, even though the proposal has gained a large majority among the parties in the *Folketing*. Since 1980 Sweden has also had the option of holding referenda on constitutional amendments. The procedure differs in two main respects from the Danish one. Firstly, the referendum is not mandatory, but can be forced by a vote of one third of the members of the *Riksdag*. Secondly, the *Riksdag* is not compelled to enact the constitutional amendment, even when a majority of the electors vote in favour. However, a negative majority of the votes cast in the referendum will prevent a proposed amendment being passed; this means that the Swedish system is negatively decisive.

At the same time as Denmark changed to a unicameral system in

1953, a further means of holding a referendum was introduced. At the initiative of a third of the members of the *Folketing*, proposed legislation can be put to the electorate. This possibility does not apply to all kinds of legislation, it does not cover financial, tax, and international laws. But it does mean that the parliamentary opposition has the option of preventing the passing of a law that has gained a majority in the *Folketing*. If a majority of those participating in the referendum vote no (at the same time they must constitute 30 percent of the total electorate), the proposed law must be dropped. This option was made use of in 1963 when the non-Socialist opposition succeeded in gaining a sufficient number of votes against to prevent the passing into law of four government proposals relating to the ownership of land.

The Danish constitution requires the holding of a referendum in a further two instances, namely the reduction of the voting age and the transfer of authority to international agencies for purposes of international co-operation. If a proposal involving the latter case cannot gain a qualified majority of five sixths of the members of the *Folketing*, the issue is put to the people and they make the decision. This option was employed in 1972 when a sufficiently large majority of the Danish people voted in favour of Danish membership of the European Community. A referendum on the same issue was held that year in Norway, where the result was the opposite one; the Norwegian referendum had significant consequences for Norwegian party politics. The option of holding a consultative referendum was also used in Denmark in 1986 by the non-Socialist minority government to win support from the electorate for recognition of Denmark's acceptance of the Single Market.

Denmark held its third referendum on EC-membership in June 1992, when a bare majority voted against the Maastricht Treaty on European Union. Less than twelve months later, after an EC summit meeting held in Edinburgh had conceded a number of exceptions to Denmark, the Danes changed their minds and voted in favour of the Treaty of European Union.

The Icelandic constitution expressly requires the holding of a referendum in three instances: in the event of proposed legislation that the President refuses to sanction, in the event that the *Althing* votes to depose the President, and in the event of a change in the state religion. None of these eventualities has ever arisen.

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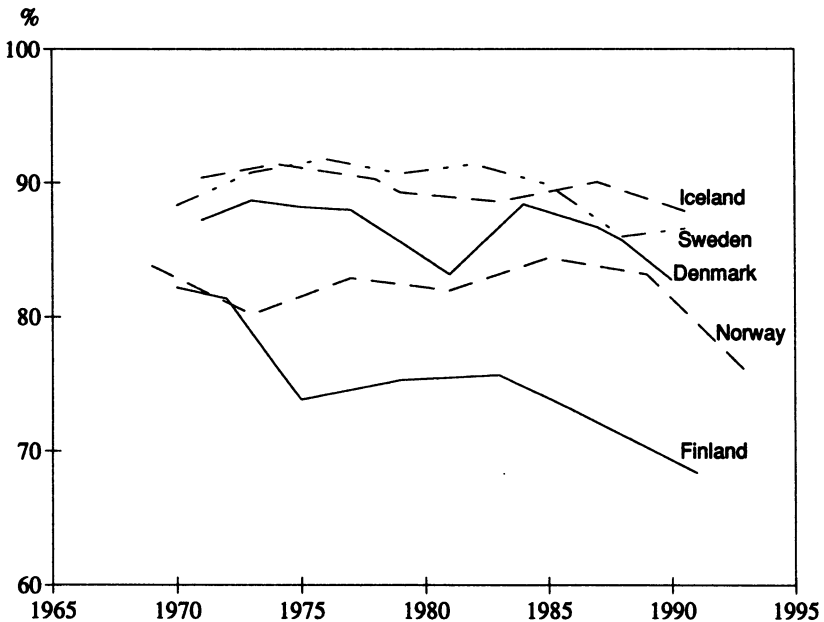
Citizens and Power

Political participation

The purpose of the rights and freedoms enumerated in the constitution is to regulate the relationship between the individual and the state. By means of the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, the individual citizen enjoys the right to participate in political life. To what extent are these universal rights and freedoms actually made use of? How widespread is participation in politics? In what ways do those who are actively engaged differ from those who are passive? Put simply, how well does the democratic process work?

Participation in Elections

The most important measure of the vitality of a representative democracy is the degree to which the electorate participates in elections. The smaller the number of electors who make use of their right to vote, the more uncertain the representativeness of the elected parliament becomes. The historical development of electoral participation in the Nordic countries follows a common pattern. During the nineteenth century the proportion of those voting was low, and large sections of the population, moreover, had no right to vote. Electoral participation then rose as the electorate was gradually mobilised. This development did not, however, take place at an even pace. At politically crucial elections, there was a major increase in the degree of electoral participation, which tended afterwards to decline once more. Nevertheless the general trend

Diagram 9.1 Electoral Participation

was towards increasing participation. There are certain national variations that may be noted. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Denmark enjoyed in relative terms the highest degree of electoral participation. Sweden was not able to reach the levels of Denmark and Norway until 1911. Two high points were reached in Finland with the critical elections of 1907 and 1917, but in the following decade the level fell again. The proportion of those voting was around the 50 per cent mark in Iceland at the turn of the century, but had already reached 80 per cent by the 1930s. Having reached a peak of between 80 and 90 per cent, Nordic electoral participation stabilised at what in international terms was a relatively high level. During the 1980s the average degree of electoral participation was 89 per cent in Sweden and Iceland, 85 per cent in Denmark, 83 per cent in Norway, and 72 per cent in Finland.

An analysis of changing trends in electoral participation during the last twenty year period shows a slight downturn for Sweden, Iceland and Denmark (diagram 9.1). However, these are relatively moderate shifts. On the other hand, the figures reveal a more definite change in Finland.

Electoral participation fell from slightly over 80 per cent to a little over 70 per cent.

Electoral participation in Åland requires special comment since it is so low, even by comparison with the elections to the corresponding autonomous institutions on the Faroes and in Greenland. In a special study carried out by Wrede (1981), the author notes that the voters of Åland differ hardly at all in terms of their interest in politics from the voters in the rest of Finland or in Sweden. The explanation is to be found instead in the particular characteristics of their political institutions. The decision-making powers of the *Lagting* have been limited, and a developed system of competing parties has been lacking until very recently.

Although 10–20 per cent of the electorate at a given election refrain from casting their vote, this does not mean that these voters are totally uninvolved in party politics. The non-voters do not form a coherent group. Danish, Norwegian and Swedish studies have all shown that roughly half of all non-voters do in fact vote in the following election. This means on the one hand that the proportion of those voting at every election is some ten per cent lower than the average figure for electoral participation, but on the other hand that the group who never cast their vote is no greater than two or three per cent.

Party Activity

A vital requirement for democracy to work is that the parties standing for election should gain the votes of the vast majority of the electorate and, as we have seen, this is nowadays the case. But how do the parties function between elections? How many members of the general public participate actively in the day to day workings of the political parties? The figures we are concerned with here are of a totally different order than those for electoral participation. The figures for the size of the proportion belonging to a party vary depending whether they are based on official statistics or on interview surveys, whether figures for collective membership are included in the case of Sweden and Norway, and whether the parties' subsidiary organisations are also included, etc. The proportion of people who declare their membership of a party varies between 10 and 20 per cent. The differences between the Nordic countries are relatively small; between a tenth and a fifth are members of a party. If we go further and ask how many participate actively in the work of a

party, above and beyond their formal membership, the results fall even further, to under 10 per cent. The active members of political parties, those who shoulder the burden of the daily running of the political parties, constitute a very small part of the population.

Associational Activity

However, this picture of the social commitment of the citizenry will remain incomplete if it is restricted solely to the political parties. Seen in numerical terms, the voluntary organisations are a very significant means for members of the public to join forces and work for common goals. If the official figures for organisational membership are added together, the total reaches very impressive levels, but because of overlapping memberships interview-based studies are necessary to determine how many people take part in associational activity and how many do not. Differences in sampling and interview techniques make direct comparisons between countries difficult, but available data shows nevertheless that a large majority of the citizenry in all the countries are members of at least one organisation. Naturally the figures are smaller if associations are discounted that almost never seek to influence the political process, or if the numbers of those who take a more active part in the work of the organisations are taken into consideration. Relatively speaking, associational activity is a vital force, nevertheless. The Norwegian Study of Power and Democracy found in 1975 that 79 per cent of the membership of Norwegian associations had attended at least one meeting in the course of the last twelfth, 65 per cent had spoken at meetings, and 21 per cent had taken part in some form of study group. Swedish surveys reveal a similar picture. Differences between various kinds of organisations were, however, considerable. The greatest level of activity occurred in the sporting and leisure organisations, religious groupings, and housewives' leagues. Trade union activity was somewhat lower than the average. Nevertheless, 40 to 50 per cent of trade union members declared that they had taken part in some form of union meeting in the course of the year; the differences between the Nordic countries were minor.

Individual Contacts

The nature of the commitment to political parties and organisations is usually of a more lasting kind and aims at promoting more general interests and requirements. Another measure of the relationship between members of the public and the state is the extent to which appeals are made by an individual against government and local authorities. This may involve obtaining redress in the case of a decision directly affecting the individual, or seeking to influence a specific matter, or changing an unsatisfactory state of affairs that exists at local level. Those measurements that have been made are not properly comparable, but show that a relatively large number, though less than half of those questioned, said that they had had contacts of this kind. The results of a Danish study indicated that 41 per cent had applied to a politician or an authority on a matter involving the person concerned or his family in the course of that year. In Norway the figure was 27 per cent for those attempting to put their case to an authority. The proportion of Swedes who indicated in 1978 that they had tried to get a local councillor or official to do something about some lack or defect in their local authority area was 23 per cent.

Direct Action

Another method of exerting political influence is in the form of direct action: demonstrations, protest meetings, collecting signatures for petitions, distributing pamphlets, fund-raising, putting up posters, etc. The proportion of people who participate as members in various action groups is small in relation to the population as a whole; the proportion varies between 1 and 3 per cent. But a significantly larger proportion of people have either come into contact with or supported direct action, most frequently in the form of signing a petition. If all these forms of participation such as signing petitions, giving financial support, public meetings, fund-raising rallies, demonstrations, and protests are added together, the proportion of active citizens is 46 per cent for Sweden, 31 per cent for Denmark, 28 per cent for Norway, and 18 per cent for Finland. Public involvement was primarily in the areas of peace and other international issues, the environment, nuclear power, and local issues.

A comparative study of grass-roots activity in the Nordic countries revealed that Sweden differed in certain respects from the other countries.

Participation was relatively large-scale and widespread in Sweden and had weaker links with both social and political factors. In Denmark, Iceland and Norway grass-roots activity was characterised by the political mobilisation during the 1970s and 1980s of the well-educated, the middle-class, and women. In Finland participation was lower than might be expected on the basis of the economic and social development of the country.

Variations in Participation

Although it is only participation in elections and formal membership of organisations that involve large sections of the population, there is also a relatively broad spectrum of opportunities for influencing the development of society, and each of these options is made use of by a considerable number of people. But an important question remains. What link exists between these various forms of participation? Two possibilities may be considered. In the first, the pattern is a cumulative one: a small and extremely active section of the population is responsible for all forms of activity. At the other extreme, the pattern would be a complementary one: a number of people are active on some issues, but passive on others. The latter possibility would mean that political participation is evenly distributed, whereas the first would mean that it is concentrated and unevenly distributed. Which of these two models actually corresponds to reality? Even though there has been some debate, particularly in Norway, on the techniques of measurement involved and on the interpretation of the findings, the main impression from all the studies carried out in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland is quite clear. In general there is a positive correlation between various measurements of political participation. Political activity is unevenly distributed.

Participation in protest actions is therefore rarely an alternative means of expression for the grass-roots, for those outside the political process. On the contrary, those individuals who are most active in protest groups are frequently those who are active in a political party. The image of the major interest organisations as an alternative channel is also misleading to some degree. The "representative" and "corporatist" channels are strongly intertwined, there is a powerful link between party activities and associational activities. The findings of these studies are clear: a small minority are responsible for a large part of all political ac-

tivity, while the great majority, apart from participating in elections, being members of organisations, and the odd bout of protest activity, are political bystanders.

The Level of Participation

The question then is whether political participation in the Nordic countries should be described as high or low. The answer depends on the point of comparison. A first option might be to compare the real situation with some specific norm. The theory of democracy does not provide any clear-cut answer. The debate on the nature of democracy that has been going on for hundreds of years has revolved to a considerable degree around this very question of what degree of participation on the part of the citizenry is desirable. The proponents of participatory democracy have pointed to the advantages, both for the political decision-making process and for the personal development of the individual, when everyone actively participates in the management of the democratic community. The proponents of representative democracy have chosen instead to highlight the practical difficulties and the problems of principle involved in direct democracy, and have emphasised instead that the core of democracy is the freedom to change those in positions of political control through open elections. Irrespective of the position adopted in this debate, it can be stated that the political institutions of the Nordic countries and (in consequence?) the pattern of public participation lie closest to the model of representative democracy.

A second point of comparison is to relate the Nordic countries to other democratic states. Statistics for electoral participation show that the Nordic countries are fully in line with the average level for states using proportional representation. Other indicators are more difficult to compare, but the Nordic countries are at the head of the rankings in terms of the scale of associational membership. It is difficult to find forms of participation that occur at lower levels than elsewhere. The conclusion is inescapable that political participation is at least as high in the Nordic countries as it is in other countries.

The third answer to the question of the scale of political participation involves a comparison over time: has activity increased or decreased? In terms of electoral participation the answer is quite clear: the period leading up to the 1960s and 1970s witnessed a gradual increase in participa-

tion, although subsequently the level has remained stagnant. Determining what has occurred with regard to the other forms of participation is more problematic: very few systematic studies exist. It is, however, evident that the local authority reorganisation involving the amalgamation of "communes" into larger units, especially in Sweden and Denmark, has had far-reaching effects on local self-government. The number of councillors elected has gone down. Swedish studies, which analysed the changes that have taken place since the end of the 1960s, have concluded that political participation has actually increased in several respects. An ever greater proportion of people are now active within the trade unions, having either spoken at a meeting, or made contact with a politician, or taken part in a demonstration. There is one exception, however: the proportion of people belonging to a political party has not risen, but remained unchanged at the same level. This latter finding seems to apply to all the other Nordic countries as well. The membership figures for the political parties have all but remained stagnant, or have even fallen as in Denmark. The answer to the question whether we should consider political participation in the Nordic countries to be high or low has therefore to be a mixed one. Compared with the theoretical norm for participatory democracy it is low, but compared with other countries it is high. The changes that have occurred over time have not been uniform.

Social Differences

The fact remains that political activity is unevenly distributed. How then can the great degree of individual variation be explained? It is a well-known fact in political sociology that certain background social features play an important role in this regard. As a rule political participation usually varies in proportion to the level of education, income, and social status. Comparative studies, however, have shown that this correlation is not equally strong in all the countries. The importance of the social factors is sometimes offset by other circumstances; people with few social resources are not always doomed to political silence. The one factor that more than any other serves to counteract individual hindrances is the existence of voluntary associations. Political inequality can be mitigated by the prevalence of mass organisations.

Seen from a historical perspective it is mainly the farmers' and work-

ers' parties and their organisations that have led to the active involvement of social groups in politics, which have remained passive in other countries. This historical fact is still reflected today in the social profile of party members. Although there is still a slight tendency in Sweden and Norway for the proportion of party members to rise with increasing education, the occupational group that contains in proportional terms the most party members is that of farmers, in Denmark as well as Finland, Norway, and Sweden. Seen as a whole, party members do not constitute a social elite. However, there are a number of other distinguishing characteristics. Party membership is slightly more usual among men than women, but it is primarily the age factor that is significant. Party members are preponderantly middle-aged and older people. This age structure is not a new phenomenon, but there are signs that suggest that the parties are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit young people.

The universally high level of electoral participation means that there are no longer any significant population groups which show significantly lower levels of participation in elections than the average. The situation used to be different. Large groups of low-income earners and women used not to vote. These differences have since been levelled out and in some instances even reversed: since the mid-1970s Swedish women have a slightly higher level of electoral participation than Swedish men (this applies particularly to younger people). The highest level of electoral participation is still to be found among the better educated, middle-aged, married, high-income earners but the difference from other groups is not so significant.

Given the widespread distribution of the economic special-interest organisations, is it hardly surprising that associational membership is linked to status in working life: the proportion of members is high among employees, low among housewives and pensioners. Women are slightly under-represented among the members of organisations. This same gender difference does not exist, however, when it comes to direct action and participation in protests, where women are at least as active as men. The two most influential factors are age and education. It is younger and better educated people that most frequently participate in political actions outside the established channels.

Political Information and Civic Competence

The mass media are the most important source of information about politics and society for the individual citizen. Almost the entire population of the Nordic countries listen to radio, watch television, or read one of the newspapers, on a daily basis. The general trend has been for the level of information of the general public to rise and for differences in knowledge between various population groups to even out. Mass media research has long struggled with the problems involved in attempting to determine in more detail the extent to which the media influence the attitudes and perceptions of the general public. Nevertheless research on the effects of the mass media has been able to show that the scope for direct influence is usually small. It is the exception that a person will change his opinion solely as a result of information provided by the mass media. Influencing opinion occurs in a more long-term fashion and involves other circumstances, such as changes in the personal situation of the individual, contacts with family, friends, and colleagues, etc. The mass media are, however, of major importance in terms of deciding which issues and ideas are considered to be of immediate interest and worth debating. This agenda-setting power can obviously be of enormous indirect importance, since it can de-select certain problems and points of view from public debate.

It is difficult to remain on a sure scientific footing when drawing conclusions about the ability of the general public to assimilate the information provided by the mass media, and about the capacity of individual citizens to keep up with political issues and make up their own minds about them. Available data from interview surveys would, however, lend support to the following description. There has been an increase in the level of political knowledge during the last few decades. The advent of television has meant an enormous change for groups which were previously characterised by inadequate information about political affairs, e.g. women and the less well-educated. Although the knowledge gap has been narrowed in this respect, this is far from meaning that all such differences have been evened out. On the contrary all studies show that factors relating to social background, particularly education, are expressed in differences relating to word comprehension, for example, and to knowledge about major political situations. At the same time as the level of information of the general public has been on the increase, ever increasing demands are being made on the capacity of the individual citizen to orient himself in the maze of authorities and organisations, regulations, and public services.

Interview surveys during election periods show that voters have generally been aware of the electoral campaign and the message of the parties and they have made up their minds about the majority of political issues being discussed. Their views are also shown to be closely linked with their choice of party and, where appropriate, to their switch to another party. There are few studies that would make possible a direct comparison between all Nordic countries, but the partial studies that have been carried out have not shown any essential differences. On the contrary, there are striking similarities in the process of opinion formation. If, in addition, we take into account the options that exist for voters to assert interests beside general elections, research exists to support the supposition that there has been an increase in the empowerment of the individual citizen. The proportion of Swedes who declared that they were able to submit a written appeal to an authority on their own rose between 1968 and 1987 from 45 to 68 per cent. The same study revealed that the proportion of the "politically impoverished", those who were neither able to submit a written appeal on their own nor knew anyone who could help them, had gone down from 18 to 10 per cent. Corresponding studies in Denmark, Norway, and Iceland show that the proportion of citizens who believe themselves capable of submitting a written appeal to an authority is at the same high level as in Sweden.

All these measures would therefore indicate that the political competence of the general public in the Nordic countries has increased. Which of the causative factors involved was most important – the higher level of education, the increased independence of women, changes to the structure of the mass media, or other factors – cannot be determined on the basis of the available data; the probability is that many concurrent factors have played a role in this regard. The question remains as to whether the changes observed have been accompanied by a shift in the attitude of the general public to the political system itself. The data available in this area is even more unreliable. A series of surveys were carried out that attempted to determine the degree of confidence in parties and politicians. Broadly speaking, the proportion of responses in Sweden expressing a lack of confidence has risen continually since 1968. Finnish studies also point to the existence of widespread dissatisfaction with politicians and parties. Corresponding surveys in Denmark do not show a clear trend; the proportion of responses showing distrust peaked with the protest elections of 1973. A Danish study also shows that this

distrust was primarily in relation to national politics. Confidence in local politicians was significantly greater.

It is probably premature to conclude on the basis of the research data available that the Nordic countries find themselves in an acute crisis of legitimacy. The majority of citizens are believed to view the political institutions as legitimate in the sense that political power is seen to be exercised in accordance with the legal norms. It is, however, less certain to what extent the executive bodies of the state enjoy political authority. Whereas the obedience of citizens in a dictatorship is based on fear and the threat of reprisals, the solidarity of citizens with the state in an ideal democracy is based on the conviction that the actions of the state are an expression of the people's will. It is an open question to what extent the political institutions in the Nordic countries of today are perceived by their citizens as realising the ideals of democracy. Richard Tomasson (1980) was struck by one of the paradoxes of the political culture of Iceland, or rather by a contradiction between its ideology and reality. On the one hand the idea of equality is one of the most prominent features in the value structure of social and political life, while on the other politics is dominated by a very small number of individuals from the social elite.

Developments in the Nordic countries have meant that there has been a gradual increase in the capacity and readiness of citizens to take responsibility for the society they live in. At the same time the political institutions are offering an unaltered or even reduced number of options for the exercise of political influence. The effect of this is to widen the gulf between latent and realised citizenship.

The Status of Women

Women and the Welfare State

If the welfare state can be said to have had a major effect on the social situation in the Nordic countries, its consequences have been all the more significant for women. This has been a two-pronged process. On the one hand the expansion of the welfare state and the public sector has been most marked in those areas traditionally thought of as belonging to women. The provision of care has largely shifted from being the concern of the family to being that of public institutions. On the other hand the

increase in the number of public sector employees has matched the exodus of women from the home. The housewife as a social category has almost disappeared in the course of a few decades. The level of women in employment has risen sharply. The proportion of women in employment in the age group from 20 to retirement age varies between 83 per cent (Sweden) and 73 per cent (Norway). The proportion of women in part-time employment is greatest in Norway. The increase in the employment of women has taken place largely in the area of the public provision of care. The fact that women have ended up for the most part doing what was traditionally women's work has meant that there continues to be a great deal of segregation by gender in the labour market. In Finland and Norway approximately one woman in two works in characteristically female occupations. In Sweden this figure is roughly four women out of every ten, while in Denmark three out of every ten women work in female" occupations.

The Political Representation of Women

Step by step, women have come to enjoy the same formal rights as men (table 9.1). In a number of respects the traditional gender divisions in relation to political participation have diminished and even disappeared. Electoral participation is nowadays at roughly the same level among women as men.

In relation to the composition of the political elite in terms of gender, however, changes have come more slowly. Even a few decades ago, the presence of a woman in a leading political post was the rare exception. In the mid-1960s there was not a single woman member, for example, on 42 per cent of Danish municipal councils.

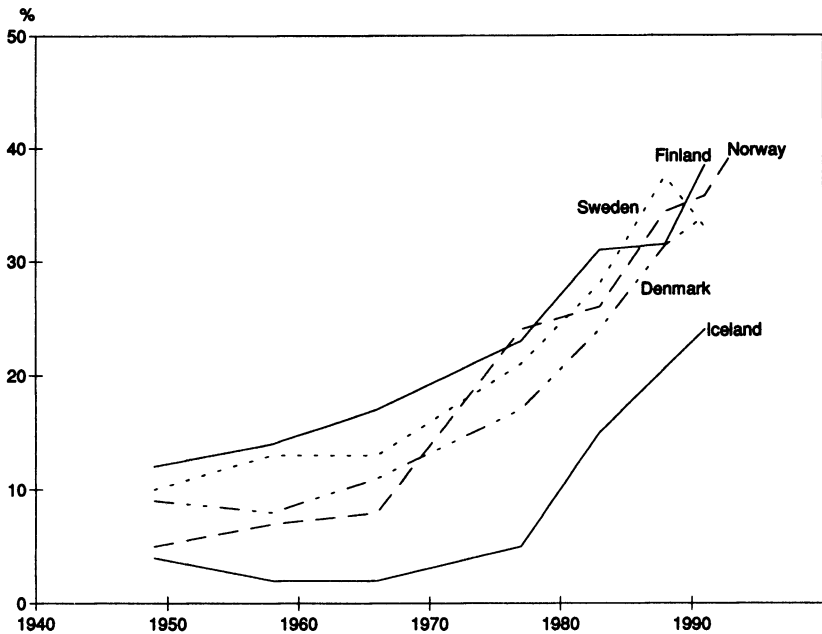
Women are still in a minority in the national parliaments, but this situation has altered very noticeably during the last few years. As diagram 9.2 shows, the proportion of women elected to the Nordic parliaments has risen, not least due to the intense efforts of the women's movement to promote women candidates during the nomination procedures of the political parties. Although Iceland has lagged somewhat behind in this respect, the proportion of women in the parliaments of the other Nordic countries had risen above one third by the beginning of the 1990s. In the 1991 election the proportion of women in the Swedish *Riksdag* fell from 38 to 33 per cent.

Table 9.1 The Road to Equality for Women

	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Finland</i>	<i>Iceland</i>	<i>Norway</i>	<i>Sweden</i>
Equal rights of inheritance for women and men	1857	1878	1850	1854	1845
Age of majority for unmarried women at 25	1857	1864	1861	1863	1858
Age of majority for unmarried women at 21		1898		1869	1874
Age of majority for married women	1899	1930	1900	1888	1921
Female suffrage and right to stand for election at local level	1908	1918	1909	1910	1919
Female suffrage and right to stand for election to parliament	1915	1906	1915	1913	1919
First woman elected to parliament	1918	1907	1922	1922	1921
First woman Cabinet minister	1924	1926	1970	1945	1947
Women admitted to university	1875	1901	1911	1884	1873
Women given the same rights as men in the civil service	1921	1926	1911	1938	1925
Women granted right to ordination	1947	1988	1911	1952	1958
Equal pay in civil service	1919	1962	1945	1959	1947
Equal pay in trade and industry	1973	1962	1961	1961	1960
Act passed on equal opportunities at work	1978	—	1973	—	1980
Act passed on equal opportunities	—	1987	1976	1979	—
Approval of the contraceptive pill	1965 ca	1961	1966	1967	1964
Women entitled to decide on abortion	1973	(1970)	(1975)	1978	1975
Both parents given the right to share parental leave	1984	1978	1980	1978	1974
Right to a six-hour working day for the parents of young children	—	1988	—	—	1979

Source: Österberg & Hedman

A comparative study of the political representation of women shows that the structure of the electoral system plays a considerable role in this regard. In countries with majority voting in single-member constituencies, it is usually a man who is chosen to represent the party. Where elec-

Diagram 9.2 Percentage of Women in the Nordic Parliaments

tions are based on proportional lists, as in the Nordic countries, the parties have a great deal of power over the nomination process and women have been deliberately selected for winnable seats. A tenth of the parties in the Nordic countries have introduced a quota system, which usually requires the proportion of both women and men on the ballot lists to be not less than 40 per cent.

The proportion of women has also risen on the decision-making bodies at the local level and is on average around the 25–30 per cent mark, although in Iceland (with its many small rural communities) the figure is somewhat lower. A campaign at the time of the Norwegian local elections in 1971 attracted much attention; the campaign was aimed at utilising the option of crossing out one name, writing in another, and accumulating names on ballots to ensure the election of more women. As a result women members were in a majority in three municipalities. The electoral system was subsequently changed.

Increased Political Power for Women?

A much discussed question and one that is difficult to resolve has been to what extent the rise in the representation of women has also led to an increase in political power for women. The refrain "where women enter, power exits" has been much repeated. The fact that more women are entering the parliaments should therefore be linked with a loss of political significance on the part of those parliaments. No systematic evidence, however, has ever been presented in support of such a link. According to what women politicians themselves think, the element of increased representation for women should lead to a greater emphasis on certain political problems, such as family issues, the environment, equal opportunities, and issues relating to the abuse of women, pornography, and prostitution. Nowadays all the Nordic countries have special government agencies and Ombudsmen for matters relating to equal opportunities.

The Danish political scientist Drude Dahlerup has shown that the transition of women from being "a small minority to a large one" has had a number of significant consequences. Old prejudices against women have diminished without disappearing totally. Women are creating new role models in public life. Social conventions have begun to wear away. Overt opposition to women politicians has been marginalised; it would seem futile now to try and confine women to the domain of the home. Fewer and fewer voters are expressing opposition to the idea of being represented by a women.

A concept much discussed by feminist scholars is that of the "critical mass"; only when women reach a certain proportion, 30 per cent for example, can formal representation be translated into real power. Dahlerup prefers instead the concept of "critical actions". Minority representation at a certain level can be made use of to implement measures to strengthen further the status of that minority. Women politicians frequently recruit new women politicians. Formal or informal quota rules can gradually move things forward. In Norway these developments have now led to a position in which roughly half the members of the Government are women.

Although the representation of women in the political sphere has increased, this change has been occurring at a considerably slower pace in other areas. There are comparatively few women in high-level executive positions. In 1989 the Swedish Study of Power and Democracy found that 87 per cent of the central power elite was made up of men. The pro-

Table 9.2 Rights and Freedoms Protected by the Constitution

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
<i>A. The Rights of the Individual</i>					
The inviolability of individual liberty	71	6–7	65	96, 99	2:3–9
The inviolability of private life	72	11–12	66	102	2:6
Right to compensation in the event of expropriation	73	6	67	105	2:18
Prohibition of retroactive legislation	–	–	–	97	2:10
Prohibition of special courts	61	13	–	–	2:11
Prohibition of capital punishment	–	–	–	–	2:4
<i>B. Freedom of Opinion</i>					
Freedom of expression	77	10	72	100	2:1, *
Freedom of association	78	10	73	–	2:1
Freedom of assembly	79–80	10	74	–	2:1
<i>C. Cultural and Social Rights</i>					
Freedom of worship	67–70	8	63–64	2	2:1
Freedom of trade	74	–	69	101	–
Social rights	75–76	6	70–71	110	1:2
Minority rights	–	–	–	110a	2:15

* Freedom of the Press Act, Freedom of Speech Act

Numbers refer to the appropriate article/clause in the Basic Law/Constitution of the countries concerned

portion of women in the political power elite was 31 per cent, 23 per cent in the cultural sector, 15 per cent in the mass media, 12 per cent in the interest organisations, 11 per cent in public administration, 5 per cent in science, and 1 per cent in business. There were almost no women at the head of major companies and banks.

Rights and Freedoms

The relationship between the citizen and the state is determined by the constitution in two different respects. The first of these is that the people are recognised as a political entity through the right to appoint the parliament at general elections. The second is made up of a number of specified rights and freedoms. These can be classified in three main categories. The first group are intended to guarantee every individual a certain

measure of legal rights. These rights make up the very heart of the liberal doctrine of liberty. According to this doctrine, every individual has the right to an independent sphere of life and the state is prevented by the constitution from infringing on the domain of the individual. As is shown in table 9.2, the constitutions of all five Nordic countries contain clauses that protect the inviolability of individual freedom: no one can be deprived of his freedom without legal process. In addition there are clauses that protect the sanctity of private life: house searches, wire-tapping, and the examination of mail are forbidden in principle. The right to property is also protected under the right to compensation in cases of expropriation. Another essential element of legal rights is the prohibition against retroactive legislation. Although in practice this is considered to apply in all the Nordic countries, it is only constitutionally guaranteed in Norway and Sweden. Sweden is the only country to expressly prohibit the death penalty in its constitution, but all the Nordic countries have removed the death penalty from their legal systems, both in time of war and in peacetime.

Another group of freedoms are intended to safeguard the necessary preconditions for a free exchange of opinions. The democratic principle of free elections would be emptied of any real content if it were not complemented by the right to form parties and political organisations, the right to freedom of assembly, and the right to express a variety of opinions in written form or by other means. Freedom of speech is written into the constitutions of all the Nordic countries; in Sweden the freedom of the press has also been given constitutional status. The Freedom of Expression Act of 1991 provides corresponding freedoms for radio, television, film and sound recordings. Freedom of association and assembly is guaranteed by all the Nordic constitutions apart from the Norwegian. It should be added at this point that freedoms of speech and the expression of opinion are not restricted solely to purely political activities. They are so generally formulated as to cover artistic, religious and scientific expression as well.

The third group of rights and freedoms concerns the social and cultural life of the citizen. The freedom to practice religion has now been stipulated by the constitutions of all the Nordic countries. This right is linked to the rights to freedom of opinion, since freedom of religion involves both the freedom of assembly and association. In Denmark, Norway and Iceland, there is a special statute that citizens are free to go about their business; this provision derives from the struggle of eco-

nomic liberalism against the old guild privileges. This clause is based on the same principle as the freedoms previously enumerated: the constitution prohibits the intervention of the state in the life of the individual. The statutes of the constitution are binding to varying degrees. While some are “absolute”, the right to freedom of assembly, for example, can be restricted by the application of another law. In Finland laws of this kind must be passed according to the same procedures as govern the enactment of constitutional legislation. Sweden has introduced a special procedure for legislation restricting rights and freedoms.

The freedoms listed above are sometimes known as “negative”. They differ from the “positive” ones which are intended instead to ensure that the state takes on certain responsibilities for the good of the citizen. The constitutions of all the Nordic countries now include provisions of this kind. In Sweden the state is charged with the task of securing the right to work, the right to housing and to education, as well as with working for social provision and security and for a decent living environment. Finland, Denmark, and Norway also have provisions on the right to work; Norway, moreover, has a constitutional provision on the right to co-determination in the workplace. Denmark and Iceland have also written in to the constitution the right to free education, as well as the right to social support for those unable to care for themselves. The juridical value of these social rights is null and void. They are included as general declarations of intent, as goals for state provision, but are not intended to form the basis for legal validation. It should be pointed out that the Nordic countries have all acceded to the European Convention on Human Rights.

Minorities

One of the fundamental dilemmas in a democracy is finding a balance between the principle of majority rule and the principle of the rights of minorities. The enumeration of rights and freedoms in the constitution is one method of defining the circumstances in which the rule of the majority can be restricted. The majority has no right to abolish the right to freedom of speech of the minority nor its right to freedom of association. This problem is at its most intense in states with ethnic and linguistic minorities.

The Sami People

The situation of the Sami people, or Lapps, in the Nordic countries has led to protracted conflicts in Norway, Sweden, and Finland between the economic and cultural dominance of the national majority and the efforts of a tiny ethnic group to preserve their identity and their way of life. There are thought to be slightly more than 60,000 Sami at present, of whom 40,000 live in Norway, 17,000 in Sweden, 4,000 in Finland, and 2,000 on the Kola Peninsula in the Soviet Union. The Sami have been subjected to discrimination and persecution for long periods. The Sami religion was eradicated by Christian missionaries and the Sami language was repressed for many years.

Attempts to turn the Sami into Norwegians, or Swedes, were replaced during the nineteenth century by the idea that the Sami were an inferior race of native people. In line with this "Lapps should stay Lapps" philosophy, the Sami were doomed to remain at a primitive level. The special nomadic schools set up at the beginning of the twentieth century meant that educational standards for Sami were lower than for other citizens.

Since the Second World War the aim of official policy has been that the Sami should be guaranteed the same quality of life as other citizens, as well as being given the opportunity to preserve their culture and language. Lessons are given in Sami in the course of compulsory schooling and at high school, college, and university. Sami literature is subsidised. This current policy was developed in Norway in the 1950s and 1960s and in Sweden in the mid-1970s.

In recent years the most intense conflicts have been about rights to the land where the Sami live. In all three of the countries concerned, reindeer-herding Sami have legally protected rights to pursue their livelihood in specially reserved mountain areas. International conventions give the Sami the right to cross national borders freely. But above and beyond this customary right, the Sami have insisted that they also enjoy age-old property rights. The territorial claims of the national majority over water rights, mining, forestry, peat-cutting, hunting, fishing, and tourism have all been challenged by the Sami. Legal disputes have in several cases led to protracted legal and political conflicts. On the whole the Sami view of the legal situation has had to give way to that of the central power.

The organisation of the Sami was weak for many years, not least as a result of the small numbers of the group, their geographic dispersal, and

oppressed status. Participation in general elections was at below average levels and for long periods the Sami lacked representation on public bodies. In Norway, the Sami have, at times, worked within the Labour Party. The Sami formed their own special-interest organisations in Finland in 1945, in Sweden in 1950, and in Norway in 1968. Co-operation is now taking place at the Nordic level (The Nordic Council of Sami) as well as within the organisation set up in 1975 for the indigenous peoples of the world (WCIP).

The guarantees of minority rights that have been expressly granted to the Sami are relatively weak. The Sami have been considered a neglected population group with the same rights as other citizens. The state has taken responsibility for the maintenance of a certain quality of social and cultural life, and in doing so has taken on the role of guardian and protector. The Sami have not won recognition as a special ethnic group with rights of their own. The right of the Sami to self-determination has been extremely limited and political decisions of vital importance for the Sami are still made by the central state authorities.

However, the trend is towards increased self-determination for the Sami. The United Nations organisation, the ILO, has adopted a new convention on the rights of indigenous peoples. Whereas previous conventions have emphasised integration, the right of indigenous peoples to their own culture and self-development is now being asserted. The convention was ratified by the Norwegian *Storting* in 1990. A new paragraph was written into the Norwegian constitution in 1988 which recognises the right of the Sami, as an ethnic group, to develop their own language, culture and social life.

Since the beginning of the 1970s, the Sami of Finland have had a parliament of their own. The Sami parliament consists of twenty members elected for four years. The parliament has no decision-making powers but serves instead as a working committee on issues concerning the legal, economic, social, and cultural affairs of the Sami.

The first elections to the *Sameting* (the Norwegian Sami parliament) were held at the same time as the elections to the *Storting* in 1989. The franchise is extended to all those who consider themselves Sami and speak Sami, or have parents or maternal or paternal grandparents who speak or spoke Sami. The *Sameting* can raise any matter affecting the Sami population and make pronouncements on it. The *Sameting* has an advisory and consultative role, as well as decision-making powers in ar-

was specifically defined by legislation. A Swedish *Sameting* was elected in 1993.

Linguistic Minorities

Although the Nordic countries appear to be culturally and linguistically homogeneous to outsiders, a number of linguistic minorities do exist. Since early times there has been a group of Finnish speakers in northern Sweden (the Tornedal Finns), and in northern Norway. North of the Danish-German border there is a German minority, and a Danish minority lives south of the border.

Swedish-speakers in Finland enjoy a special status. For centuries Swedish was the language of administration. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, Finnish nationalists won their battle to have Finnish recognised as an official language. Today the Swedish-speaking minority makes up less than six per cent of the population. Special legislation on language lays down the rights of the two linguistic groups. A municipal authority is counted as monolingual if the minority makes up less than eight per cent of the inhabitants. Bilingualism comes into effect when the minority makes up at least eight per cent or amounts to more than 3,000 individuals. The municipal authorities can be divided on this basis into four groups: bilingual municipalities with Finnish as the first language, bilingual municipalities with Swedish as the first language, Finnish-speaking municipalities and Swedish-speaking municipalities (these exist on Åland as well as in municipal districts in Österbotten and the Åboland archipelago).

Immigrants

A century ago emigration was greater than immigration. Many Nordic inhabitants left their homes to find a better life in other countries. This emigration was on a particularly large scale to the United States.

There have been more immigrants than emigrants since the Second World War. During the first post-war decades, the importation of labour was the main cause of immigration. A major part of these migrations occurred between the Nordic countries. There has been a free labour market within the Nordic countries since the beginning of the 1950s. A large number of Finns have made Sweden their home. In recent

years it has been the influx of refugees and therefore extra-Nordic immigration that has been the dominant factor.

Among the Nordic countries it is Sweden that has the largest proportion of immigrants as a percentage of its population, followed by Norway and then Denmark. It is mainly the citizens of other Nordic countries, Americans, and Englishmen who make up the numbers of foreign citizens in Iceland. Finland has the smallest proportion of immigrants among the Nordic countries.

Immigrants have recently demanded the right to participate in political life. Foreign citizens resident in the country for a minimum of three years have had the right to vote and stand as candidates in local elections since 1976 in Sweden, 1981 in Denmark, and 1983 in Norway. Nordic citizens resident in another Nordic country for at least three years have had the right to vote in local elections since 1976 in Sweden and Finland, 1978 in Denmark, 1979 in Norway, and 1982 in Iceland.

10

The Power Structure

It is the history of their party systems and political cleavages that serves to distinguish the Nordic countries from the other states of Western Europe. Nordic politics have been dominated by socio-economic cleavages. Regional, religious, ethnic, and linguistic cleavages have played a subordinate role in the modern period. An appropriate point of departure for a depiction of the power structure of the Nordic countries would therefore be with the major economic interests.

Economic Interests

The economic history of the last hundred years has seen a profound transformation of society. An agricultural society has been replaced by an industrial society which is in turn being transformed into a post-industrial, internationalised service society. All three of these forms of society have had a decisive impact on the formation of the main social forces of today. The structure of society can be seen as a series of layers deposited by three separate economic sectors which have each dominated their respective historical epochs.

The Primary Sector

The social structure of agricultural society was determined both by the conflict between town and country, and by the class differences in rural areas. Only in Denmark and southern Sweden were the owners of large

farms and estates the dominant force. It has been the independent status of the owner-farmer that has determined the political life of the Nordic countries in many respects. The Nordic countries have a long history of local self-government. Comparatively speaking, the political representation of farmers at national level has been very powerful. The prevalence of special farmers' parties has had a decisive impact on the structure of the party systems and on the shaping of parliamentary democracy. The development of economic associations to represent farmers' interests has been of great importance for the organisation of the primary industries.

A peculiarity of the Finnish situation was the existence of a large agricultural proletariat. Through land reforms those without land in the countryside were given the opportunity of becoming smallholders. Agricultural workers and smallholders have been an important source of electoral support not only for the Agrarian League/Centre Party but also for the Communists (so-called backwoods Communism) and the populist Finnish Rural Party.

The importance of the primary industries is greatest today in Denmark and Iceland. A quarter of Danish export revenues come from the foodstuffs sector. Fishing accounts for two thirds of Icelandic exports.

The Secondary Sector

The main cleavage in industrial societies divides labour and capital. Both sides are comparatively well-organised in the Nordic countries. The level of trade union organisation is higher than in most industrialised countries. The labour parties have had a great deal of political influence. These general characteristics conceal a number of national variations. It has been the Swedish labour movement that has dominated its country's politics longest. The relative size of the industrial sector, and therefore of the working class, is smaller in Iceland. The Icelandic and Finnish labour movements have also been characterised by internal splits. In the rest of the Nordic countries the Social Democrats have been in a dominant position.

The structure of industry, and therefore the class structure of business, differs in a number of respects among the Nordic countries. Privately-owned, export-oriented corporations are most important in relative terms in Sweden, followed by Finland. The Danish economy con-

tains a greater element of small companies. State-owned industries play a relatively greater role in Finland.

The internal conflicts of interest within private enterprise touch not least upon the tensions between large and small companies as well as the conflict between the interests of the country, the interests of the branch, and the interests of trade and industry as a whole. Differences of opinion also exist in assessing the desirability of pacts and compromises made with the opposite side, the labour movement.

The Tertiary Sector

Agriculture and industry now provide employment for a minority of the population. The proportion of employees whose livelihoods depend on the primary and secondary industries has been decreasing for several years and amounts to one third in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. Service and information industries now account for a dominant and increasing part of the active labour force.

The formation of interest organisations for the service sector resembles the pressure groups of agricultural and industrial societies at least in one respect. Trade union organisation among salaried employees is comparatively high; in Sweden it is at the same level as among industrial workers. Their political organisation is, however, different. The service sector has not given rise to separate parties. There are no parties for salaried employees, as such. The political impact of salaried employees finds expression in more indirect ways.

In Nordic societies, with the exception of Iceland to some extent, the public sector accounts for a large part of the production of services. In terms of their numbers alone, public employees make up a significant interest group. Surveys of attitudes suggest that a political gulf exists within the middle class. Salaried staffs employed within the public sector are to the left of those employed within the private sector, as far as their views on the welfare state and state regulation are concerned. Parties to the left of the Social Democrats have been supported by professional and graduate employees of the generation of '68, particularly in the areas of education and culture. Moreover, the growth of the public sector has led to a political backlash. Protest parties such as the Progress parties in Denmark and Norway and New Democracy in Sweden have set their sights on reducing taxation and state bureaucracy.

A Three Class Model

The social basis of twentieth century politics has been described with the help of a triangle with agriculture, capital, and labour at its three corners. This model was originally intended to describe Norwegian politics but can be extended to cover all the Nordic countries. These three main economic interests have had a decisive influence on Nordic society through their organisations and their political parties. The model not only illustrates the arenas of conflict but also the opportunities for pacts and coalitions: between labour and agriculture (Red-Green political cooperation, the “Red-Soil” coalitions); between labour and capital (collective bargaining, historic compromises); and between agriculture and capital (defence of the right to property, non-Socialist political coalitions). Any assessment of the relevance of the three class model has to be a mixed one. On the one hand, it is vital for understanding the economic interests that have moulded the major cleavages of party politics in the Nordic countries. On the other hand, the model describes the society of yesterday. The model does not capture the interests and conflicts, specific to the internationalised service and information society.

National Centres of Power

It is characteristic of modern societies, like those of the Nordic countries, that power is largely organised on a collective basis. In most cases, lists drawn up of the most powerful individuals make clear that institutionalised power is more important than the purely personal. The social power elite is made up essentially of the leading representatives of the great collective organisations. In a survey undertaken by the Swedish Study of Power and Democracy into the national power elite, seven institutionally based main sectors were distinguished: politics, public administration, trade and industry, the organised interest groups, the mass media, science, and culture. This division can serve as the point of departure for a general survey of the most important national power centres in the other Nordic countries as well.

Politics

In all the Nordic countries the Government plays a central role in political life. Finland constitutes an exception in this respect as a result of the separation of power between the President and the Cabinet. The internal balance of power varies from area to area. Foreign affairs has been the domain of the president, whereas it has been the cabinet which has dealt with domestic matters on the whole. When it comes to the balance of power within governments themselves there are, formally at least, considerable differences between the Nordic countries. In the West Nordic tradition of ministerial government, the power of decision lies with the individual minister. The Swedish model places the emphasis on the collective responsibility of the Government. In practice, however, the differences are less pronounced. The Government is expected to maintain the appearance of political unity to the outside world. It is firstly the Prime Minister and secondly the Minister of Finance who are responsible within and to Government for co-ordinating its workings.

There have been many different assessments of the relative power of parliament. The concept of representative democracy stipulates that it is the elected representatives of the people who exercise supreme political authority. The objection most usually raised against this idealised image is that the role of parliament has been restricted to confirming decisions that have already been made elsewhere. Currently available research provides us with a rather more differentiated picture. In recent years parliament has actually become rather more important. Minority parliamentarism in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden has led to decisions being taken on several important political issues through the formation of coalitions within parliament.

It is the political parties that play a key role in a parliamentary system. In general the Nordic parties have not only served as electoral organisations but have also functioned as encompassing mass organisations based on stable economic interests. However, the parties are currently going through a profound transformation. The increasing volatility of the electorate has undermined the foundations of the parties. Public subsidy for the parties has replaced voluntary contributions as the most important source of income. Decision making within the parties is very centralised, but power over the nomination process still rests with the local constituency organisations.

The problems faced by the Nordic parties are by no means unique, but form part of an international pattern. Of course explanations can be

found, both sociological (the cleavages that determined the development of the parties have become less important; the modern mass media have transformed the political communication process) and economic (recession and increased tax-fatigue have reduced the capacity of the parties to respond to the wishes of the electors). But the crisis of the political parties is particularly pronounced in the Nordic countries, where the party system has had such a central role as intermediary between citizen and state.

Public Administration

A large public sector together with a combination of great power at the centre and extensive local autonomy are characteristic of the social structure of the Nordic model. The power of the bureaucracy ought therefore, apart from in the administration of local government, to reside in the leadership of central public administration.

The formal separation of ministries and central administrative agencies in the East Nordic administrative model gives the impression that politics and bureaucracy are separated by a clearly defined boundary. In reality this is hardly the case. Both formal management as well as informal links mean that the dividing line between the ministries and the central authorities is being crossed on a daily basis. The practical consequence of this is that the similarities between the Nordic countries are greater than the differences.

From a historical perspective, central public administration and its predominantly legally trained civil servants must be accorded a very important role in all the Nordic countries. During the phase of expansion of the welfare state, sectorisation was the dominant organisational principle. A number of specialised administrative agencies were set up in sector after sector.

Today, however, the central civil service is going through a total transformation. The importance of the exercise of formal authority and operational control is being reduced in favour of monitoring, oversight, and evaluations. At the same time, decision-making in many areas is shifting from national to international agencies. As a result, central state power is caught in the middle between internationalisation on the one hand and decentralisation on the other.

The administration of justice is dispensed by public institutions at na-

tional level. As in all states governed by law, the law courts in the Nordic countries are independent of the political powers that be. In relation to the Western democracies there are, however, a number of variations when it comes to the political significance of the law courts. In countries with separate constitutional courts and extensive procedures for judicial review, the law courts can have a decisive impact on politics. In the Nordic countries, and this is particularly the case in Sweden, the courts have not enjoyed this kind of political significance.

Both formally and in real terms, the Church should be included under the heading of public administration. The system of established churches means that the Church has not developed its own institutions, free from state control. Appointments and organisation within the Church have been largely determined by political decisions.

The role of the head of state is in comparative terms greatest in Finland. The Icelandic president has, in common with the Scandinavian monarchs, mainly ceremonial duties. All the Nordic heads of state, apart from the King of Sweden, are formally responsible for the formation of governments. As in Great Britain, the extent to which the Scandinavian royal families are able to exert indirect symbolic power is a difficult question to resolve, and one which given the lack of research must remain open.

Business

As mentioned earlier there are a number of differences between the Nordic countries when it comes to the structure of industry. The major companies are most important in Sweden and Finland in relative terms.

Private ownership is the dominant form of ownership of the major corporations in the Nordic countries. The shares of companies quoted on the stock exchange are mainly controlled by a small number of major shareholders. The importance of corporate bodies is increasing at the cost of the private share-holding families; with increasing frequency companies are owned by other companies, funds, and trusts. Ownership has become institutionalised.

There is another feature common to the ownership structure of industry. Ownership is tending to accumulate in particular spheres of interest. Banks and insurance companies are playing a strategic role in this regard.

Differentials in the number of votes per share have been exploited in all the Nordic countries to strengthen the power of dominant shareholders. A minority share-holding can be turned into a position of real control over a company as a result of vote value differentiation and chains of indirect ownership.

State-owned companies make up an important sphere of ownership in Finland, Norway and Sweden. Finnish state companies can be found mainly in basic industries such as forestry, metal-working, mines, and electricity generation. State holdings in Norway are dominated by the involvement of the state in the petroleum sector. Swedish state-owned companies are in the process of being privatised. The role of the Danish state as an industrial proprietor has always been more limited.

By comparison with the rest of Europe, co-operative companies play a relatively major role in Nordic industrial life. Producer co-operatives dominate within agriculture and fisheries in particular. Consumer co-operatives are of great importance in the retail trade.

Private companies have two ways open to them of influencing political decision-making, either on their own or by co-operating with a special interest group such as employer organisations and industrial federations. Evidence exists to suggest that it has become more usual for major companies to act on their own.

Working conditions and wages in the Norwegian petrol sector have been regulated by other means than the traditional method of the Nordic model, i.e. central agreements between both sides of the labour market.

The power of industry can be evaluated both by reference to its capacity to influence collective bargaining and political decisions directly affecting individual companies, and in relation to the general balance of power between the private and the public spheres. Seen in this light, the position of power enjoyed by private industry seems less under threat than it did a few decades ago. Plans for extensive nationalisation are no longer being advanced as part of the political debate. During the 1980s, market concepts have triumphed over the idea of the planned economy. The arrest and transformation of the public sector were largely inspired by models derived from private industry. The internationalisation of the capital markets has made capital more mobile and, in consequence, less vulnerable to political actions restricted to the national level.

Interest Organisations

Organised interest groups and their political influence have been discussed in a chapter of their own. The organisations concerned with a number of economic special interests have a particular status, not least because of the close links between interest organisations and political parties. It would hardly be possible to describe the power centres of the Nordic countries without reference to the farmers' organisations, the trade unions and organisations representing industry.

But there are other special interests as well that bring their influence to bear through centrally-based interest organisations. On particular issues, significant power is exercised by representatives for children, young people, international aid, housing, the environment, adult education, peace, defence, the handicapped, patients, sport, international issues, immigrants, women, motorists, the temperance movement, pensioners, and various religious groups.

Members of interest organisations are not always only individual citizens but occasionally organisations may represent other organisations. To exert pressure at national level, local authorities have formed their own pressure groups, such as the Association of Municipal Authorities (*Kommunförbundet*) in Sweden.

The Mass Media

The power of the mass media is embodied both by journalists as a collective force, and by the leaders of the major mass media institutions. Proprietors and chief editors of the major daily newspapers set the guidelines for the transmission of news and opinion formation at national as well as at local level.

As part of the survey of the elite undertaken by the Study of Power and Democracy in Sweden, the positions looked at within radio and television included managing directors and board chairmen, heads of channels, the heads of the more important news programs, as well as the producers and editors of major programs which focus on social issues.

The distinguishing features of radio and television in the Nordic countries were until very recently public service, state monopoly, and a small number of alternative channels. The broadcasting franchise is now being extended. Advertising is widespread. The preconditions for a uniform, extremely politically-controlled process of opinion formation are

being weakened further. The interests of private proprietors and commercial criteria are gaining greater importance. To complete the picture of the structure of the mass media, mention should also be made of news agencies as well as the wealth of specialist periodicals for trade unions and other associations.

Science

In a well-developed information and skills society, expert knowledge plays a crucial role. The professions are able to exercise a great deal of power in their sphere through their monopoly of professional competence. Scientists can have a decisive influence on the preparation and implementation of political decisions in their role as experts. The universities thus gain a twofold importance, both as the generators of scientific knowledge and as the educators of future generations of leaders. The Nordic university systems do not have the same elite character as do some colleges in France or England, for example.

The Arts

The study of the Swedish power elite looked at the cultural sector from two aspects. Firstly, leading cultural figures in literature, theatre, film, art, and music were studied. And secondly, attention turned to decision-makers in the public sphere of the arts, such as the heads, directors, and board chairmen of major institutions, organisations, and companies operating in the arts. In some countries the cultural elite serves as a separate power centre, not least when fulfilling its critical function and providing a forum for opposition to established ideas. In a number of other countries, including the Nordic ones, writers, artists, and musicians play a less independent political role and may through links of various kinds be allied to other power elites.

Power systems

It is one thing to identify various power centres in society. The next question is what mutual connections exist between these various collec-

tive bodies. The theoretical literature of the social sciences may be read as a series of hypotheses on the structure of power.

The concept of the hierarchical society sees society as ordered like a pyramid. At the pinnacle is an autocrat, an absolute monarch for example. A combination of majority rule and hierarchy might also be envisaged: the pinnacle of the pyramid would be made up in this case of the elected representatives of the people. In the hierarchical society the power at a lower level is subordinated to that at a higher level.

In a parliamentary system the link between the various organs of the state can be seen as ordered on the vertical axis of hierarchy; the Government is subordinated to parliament; the administration is accountable to Government. Another theoretical model of society is the pluralistic society. In this model there is no single centre from which all power derives. Society is constructed instead around a large number of mutually independent collective bodies. The large number of these bodies and their mutual balance are seen as contributing to the self-regulation and maintenance of the system.

The concept of pluralism depends on some form of separation of power. This principle of the separation of power means that power within the public sphere is distributed so that the courts, for example, are given a status independent of the political powers that be. From the point of view of society as a whole, the general concept of the separation of power is expressed in the idea of a mixed form of government. No single principle of social organisation is permitted to dominate society. Society may therefore be seen as a number of separate spheres, each governed by its own rules. Economic life, for example, is governed by the principle of the market, politics by the rule of the majority, and associational life by the idea of co-operation.

It is obvious that none of these rarefied, theoretical models provides a realistic picture of the actual power structure of society. Although the hierarchical principle characterises many large, formally organised collective bodies, such as companies, government agencies, and interest organisations, this hierarchy is interfered with to a considerable degree by other organisational principles. The existence of many varying power centres lends a certain credibility to the idea of a pluralistic society, but the multiplicity of mutually interdependent relationships and connections makes the idea of a totally self-regulating system unrealistic. In reality the various spheres of society overlap one another. The market is maintained and regulated by a legal system that is ultimately based on

political decisions. Market concepts influence in return the management of the public sector.

The Negotiated Economy

In order to paint a more realistic picture of the way power is exercised in the Nordic societies, political scientists have developed the concept of the *negotiated economy*. This term is used to mean that a large number of important decisions are made as a result of negotiations between various independent centres of power in the state, the organisations, and industry. This system differs both from the market and the mixed economies. In a market economy it is the mechanisms of the market which, within the framework of law, are the determining factor in economic decision-making. In the mixed economy, part of the process of price-formation takes place in line with government decisions, while another part is determined by market principles. In the negotiated economy on the other hand, a significant part of wages, prices, and profits is determined by negotiations between elected bodies, administrative agencies, and other collective and individual protagonists in the market.

Unlike political decision-making, decisions made in the negotiated economy are made on the basis of the interaction of independent agents. Public authorities are just one protagonist among many. Decisions made in the negotiated economy are not legally enforced but are the result of politically binding agreements. Unlike the market concept of exogenous preferences, decisions made in the negotiated economy are made by means of consultations, at which the process of opinion formation and the influence of preferences are of vital importance (Nielsen & Petersen 1989).

The Integration of Power

The concept of the negotiated economy captures one of the distinguishing features of the social systems of the Nordic model. This system is not based on the separation of power but on the integration of power. This concept would seem to have much in common with the phenomenon referred to as corporatism. This model depends on co-operation, consultation, compromise, consensus, and an orientation towards practical solutions.

The question then is to what extent this picture of the negotiated economy, the integration of power, and corporatism provides a valid description of the the Nordic societies of the present day. There is a lot to suggest that this theory manages to capture some essential features, not least when it comes to the process of decision-making at local level. The increased involvement of the municipal authorities in industrial policy in terms of company closures, investment, and local development have led to a system of close co-operation between municipal authorities and private companies, trade unions, organisations representing industry, and political parties. Many large-scale construction and town-planning projects are determined in reality by a process known as forward planning. This means that planning and project work are the subject of negotiations between landowners, construction companies, politicians, local authority officials, trade unions, local employers, and other interested parties.

Any assessment of the workings of the negotiated economy depends, of course, on which criteria are chosen for the evaluation. There have been differences of opinion on this matter, and these have shifted in turn in the course of time. In a number of studies, the positive side emerges. The Nordic countries are said to have discovered an efficient, smooth and peaceful means of resolving complex social conflicts. Subsequently more critical assessments have become more frequent. The integration of power has proved to have disadvantages in terms of lack of oversight and control. The requirements of the rule of law for clearly defined regulations and conditions of accountability are becoming difficult to meet. The general interest may suffer. The real decisions are made as a result of a complex network of discussions; formal political decision-making becomes simply a process of confirmation. This makes the process of assigning political responsibility more difficult.

The Model Challenged

The kind of power system described using terms such as negotiated economy, corporatism, and the integration of power has long characterised the decision-making process at national level as well. These are all crucial elements of the kind of society that goes under the name of the Nordic model. Economic and social changes now occurring mean, how-

ever, that several of the preconditions for the existence of this model are being challenged.

It is obvious in retrospect that the methods used within the Nordic model for the exercise of power have benefited from a number of special circumstances. The model was based on economic growth. This system works best in a society with a comparatively simple and stable conflict structure. An important requirement is that major social interests and social groups can be represented by a relatively small number of centralised organisations. In order for the results of negotiations and compromises between representatives of power centres to be acceptable to the general public, the system needs to be recognised as legitimate; the authority of those in power has to be supported by a stable basis of confidence. Another vital requirement is that major financial and political decisions can be made at the national level; the integration of power builds on the yoking together of interests, organised on the basis of the nation as a whole. All of these requirements have become progressively harder to meet in recent years.

The conflict structure of society is characterised by a number of different dimensions and increasing complexity. The three class model of agricultural and industrial society is still reflected today in major conflicts of interest, but an ever increasing number of matters do not fit into the simple triangular scheme.

The structure of organisations is becoming more fragmented and more complex as well. The major organised interest groups are finding it more and more difficult to represent the interests of their members as being homogeneous.

Confidence in the established social institutions has been weakened. The left-wing movement in the late 1960s posed a threat to industry. The Conservative revival of the 1980s challenged the public authorities. The ecological movement of the last decade has called into question the authority of scientists and other experts.

The process of internationalisation means that many important decisions are no longer made at the level of the nation state. The internationalisation of trade and industry and the increasing importance of the European institutions are reducing the relative importance of traditional national solutions.

Waiting for the Finnish Revolution?

These changes to society are not unique to any one particular country. On the contrary, they reflect a general process of transformation affecting industrial countries at present. However, the changes have differing degrees of effect, depending on the particular institutions and historically determined characteristics of individual countries.

Among the Nordic countries these changes first made themselves felt, and have had the greatest impact in Denmark. As a consequence of its industrial structure, the institutions of industrial society in Denmark never enjoyed the same importance as they did in Sweden, for example. Membership of the European Community and the parliamentary instability that began in the first half of the 1970s have also served to distance Denmark from the prototype of the Nordic model.

These changes have been occurring in the same direction in Norway as well, although the effects have not been as pronounced. The dispute about membership of the EC exposed the deep gulf that exists between the centre of the country and its periphery. The period of stable majority parliamentarism has been followed by unstable minority governments and a significant element of protest voting.

Sweden has long seemed to constitute an exceptional case in both European and Nordic terms. The changes that were affecting the other Nordic countries seemed regularly to pass Sweden by. Sweden became the prototype for the Nordic model: powerful Social Democracy, dominant central organisations, a large public sector, and low unemployment. But at the beginning of the 1990s these features were challenged. The question is now no longer why Sweden was the exception, but why the process of change was so delayed in Sweden.

For many years Iceland also appeared to constitute a special case. Icelandic society used to be ruled by a small group of individuals who were united by a common nationalism and kept together by mutual ties of kinship, schools, and friendship. Political parties, interest organisations, companies, banks and newspapers were integrated in a symbiotic network. However, this elite structure is now being broken up. The process of professionalisation of civil servants and journalists and the increasing number of independent pressure groups and companies means the Icelandic political life is becoming more pluralistic, more determined by mutually competing groups and institutions.

The development of Icelandic society can hardly be said to be moving in the direction of the Nordic model. The public sector does not have the

same importance as in the other Nordic countries; on the contrary the 1980s were shaped by the values of neo-liberalism. The strong emphasis of the Nordic model on negotiated settlements between powerful collective organisations does not enjoy the same importance in Iceland.

In the light of the general changes taking place in European society, and now in the Nordic countries as well, it is rather Finland that now appears to be the exception, to be the last outpost of the Nordic model. Finnish parliamentarism is nowadays characterised by broad, stable majority governments. Decisions on taxation, prices, and wages have largely been arrived at as a result of consultations between central representatives of the various interest groups. A consensus culture defines the political climate.

Several factors help to explain the exceptional status of Finland. Firstly, the modernisation of Finnish society has occurred comparatively recently. Urbanisation and the depopulation of rural areas did not come fully into effect until the 1960s. Social welfare and living standards lagged behind the rest of the Nordic countries; it was not until the 1980s that Finland made up the head start of the others. Secondly, consensus politics have long had a real foundation. The experience of the civil war and the foreign affairs dimension have played a major role here. Finland's delicate relations with the Soviet Union and the powerful position of the president in foreign affairs placed important restrictions on the political players in domestic affairs. A third factor has been the constitution and its requirement of qualified majority voting. Many political issues have therefore necessitated the establishment of broadly based, unifying alliances.

The question now is whether these factors are powerful enough for Finland to remain the exception. A number of signs point to a reduction in the differences between Finland and the other Nordic countries. Currently Finland only departs marginally from the norm when it comes to social structure and living standards. The importance of the foreign affairs factor has lessened with the end of the Cold War.

Comparatively speaking, Finland is starting to seem very like a boiling kettle fitted with a very tight lid. A Nordic survey of political participation found that the level of grass roots activity increases in step with the development of a post-industrial society. The service society is creating new forms of conflict where the protection of interests can be carried out more effectively by grass roots activity than by traditional organisational channels. At the same time the rising level of education is equipping

citizens with a greater number of individual resources and with new values. This increases the tendency to exploit other political forms of expression than those linked to the hierarchically structured organisations.

In Finland this pressure from below can hardly be said to be out in the open as yet. There is an increasing ground swell of dissatisfaction with the fact that centralised agreements on incomes policy leave so little room for manoeuvre at the local level. Declining electoral participation is a sign of the lack of legitimacy of the traditional political channels. The question is rather how much longer this imposed consensus can be maintained. The study in question ends with the conjecture that in the next few years there will be "an explosion of participation in Finland" (Togeby 1989).

Nordic Convergence?

As previous chapters have shown, Nordic politics is shaped by the admixture of a multiplicity of various forms of government. These are frequently the result of long term historical developments. Old institutions and complex procedures are discarded in favour of new ways of doing things and modern principles. There is an inherent inertia in political institutions; once established they begin to live a life of their own and become very difficult to abolish. A study of the way a country is governed becomes a kind of exercise in political geology. The bedrock is not uniform but made up of the deposits of history, faultlines, and weathered fragments.

A comparison of the Nordic countries shows that many of their differences can be traced back to the historical peculiarities of individual countries. But the issue here is whether the differences between the political institutions are greater today or less than before. Can we discern a tendency towards convergence or are the individual differences still in force, perhaps increasing, even?

Although common features can be discerned at any particular point, it is the differences that predominate on closer historical inspection. During the eighteenth century Denmark was ruled by an absolute monarch, whereas Sweden was experimenting with an extensive degree of parliamentary power. At the end of the nineteenth century three of the Nordic

countries were at the height of their struggles for independence. During the inter-war period Finland had still not healed the wounds of the civil war, and Iceland was still some way from independence. It was only after the Second World War that conditions were right for the development of autonomous democracies in all five Nordic countries. Naturally, during this last half-century there are a number of differences that have remained in force. A few examples may serve to illustrate this. The scale of Denmark's institution of the popular referendum makes the country a special case. The scope for a personal element in elections varies greatly: Finland and Sweden make up the opposite ends of the spectrum in this regard. The Social Democratic parties in Iceland and Finland are still considerably weaker than in the other Nordic countries. The power of the president gives parliamentary democracy in Finland a character all its own. Majority coalitions predominate in the governments of Finland and Iceland. The West and East Nordic traditions of public administration are still distinguishable from one another. Regional administration is set up on a different basis in Finland.

But besides these still prevalent differences, there are powerful forces moving towards convergence. The organisation of local government has gone through a similar process of change, which has been most far-reaching in Sweden and Denmark. Apart from the varying scope for the election of individuals, the methods of proportional election are mainly structured in a similar fashion. Trends among the electorates are similar: strong (but weakening) in terms of class voting, increased volatility. The parliaments are becoming more fragmented. Working practices in the parliaments have moved in the same direction, towards increased specialisation. The parliaments have gained increased vitality after a period of declining importance. Public administration shows a number of common features: more independent agencies such as directorates, advisory councils, and tribunals are being set up in the West Nordic ministerial tradition of administration, while Sweden and Finland are discussing various ways of increasing political control over the administration. Decentralisation is being debated and introduced throughout the Nordic countries. In all the countries campaigns are being run against the negative effects of bureaucracy. In international terms the organised interest groups still play a major role, but the organisations are becoming more fragmented and corporate institutions are under threat. The relationship of the citizen to the state – the scale of political participation and the structures of opinion formation – has more points of similarity than difference.

Any comparison of the political systems of the Nordic countries needs to be based not on five units but on eight. Although in constitutional terms, the Faroes, Greenland, and Åland form part of Denmark and Finland respectively, the trend on these islands is towards greater political autonomy. In the rest of the Nordic countries, their efforts to gain independence are often met with that mixture of indifference, ignorance, and superiority that defined the Danish colonial attitude towards Iceland. The domestic political scene in the three provinces is taking on a more permanent character and is composed of a wholly individual mixture of domestic tradition and influences from the mother country and the other Nordic states.

An overall view of the Nordic political institutions shows that despite the differences that remain, there are significant moves towards convergence. This is not the place to attempt to define the causes of this process; some of the developmental features are common to all the Nordic countries, as well as to the rest of the industrialised countries, while others are the result of forces at work within the Nordic countries themselves.

II

Nordic Co-operation

The Nordic area as a geographic concept is simply a collective term for five nation states and three autonomous areas. It is quite another question whether the Nordic countries actually function as a community in political, economic, social and cultural terms. A real community would mean that inter-Nordic national borders would have no practical significance.

The Conditions for Community

The degree of actual community is determined by three principal factors: identity, integration, and internationalisation.

Identity

By identity we mean a sense of belonging together that transcends national frontiers and is based on a community of culture and common values.

As previous chapters have shown, there are many historically determined differences, but also a great number of similarities. In international terms “the Nordic model” constitutes a specific type of polity that has served to unite the Nordic countries.

The boundaries between the Nordic countries were a continual source of conflict and war for many centuries. The epoch of the birth of the nation states is, however, now past. The borders of the five nation states

are well-established today. Demands for the right to national self-determination are heard only from Greenland, and to some extent, from the Faroes and the Sami people.

In linguistic terms the Nordic countries only partially constitute a community. Danish, Faroese, Icelandic, Norwegian (Dano-Norwegian and New Norwegian), and Swedish belong to the Nordic family of languages. Faroese and Icelandic are related to Old Norwegian but are not understood by Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes. Finnish and Sami are related languages although not mutually intelligible. The language of Greenland is not related to the other Nordic languages.

Integration

Nordic community has been promoted by reciprocal impulses between the countries. There are a wealth of examples in the political sphere of legislation and reforms that have been inspired by one of the neighbouring countries. Formal and informal links have promoted this kind of policy diffusion. Integration may be the result of deliberate organised efforts. Over the years Nordic co-operation has become institutionalised in various forms. A great part of the work of Nordic co-operation takes place on a voluntary basis. The Nordic Union, a voluntary association, plays an important role in promoting Nordic affinity.

Internationalisation

Common ties between the Nordic countries should also be seen from the perspective of the general process of internationalisation. New communication technologies are bridging geographic distances. News, cultural events, and fashion trends spread swiftly across the the whole world. Major social problems, such as the pollution of the environment, know no territorial frontiers. The process of economic integration is lessening the importance of the nation states. International organisations are growing in number and becoming increasingly important as decision-making bodies. As far as the Nordic countries are concerned, it is the links with the rest of Europe that are of particularly great importance. A great many barriers between the Nordic states have disappeared as a by-product of the general process of integration in Western Europe.

The Nordic Countries, Europe and the World

It is not possible to document in exact figures the scale of feelings of community. There have, however, been a few attempts to describe the attitude of Nordic citizens to Nordic co-operation and to the other Nordic countries. The most recent data available comes from 1992. One of the questions posed in the interview survey was which countries people thought it was important for their own country to cooperate with. The Nordic area is seen by the populations of the Nordic countries as providing them with the natural focus for co-operation in the spheres of political, economic and cultural life. But other countries are also seen as important in terms of co-operation. Geographical and historical factors have a vital role to play here. Germany is seen as an important partner by Danes and Swedes. The USA is cited relatively frequently by Icelanders and Swedes. Russia stands out as the most important country to Finns. The Baltic countries are named most frequently by Finns and Swedes. Furthermore, many Nordic citizens believe that the relations of their individual countries to the European Union are best managed by a coordinated Nordic approach.

To what extent, then, does this data on attitudes correspond to actual patterns of interaction? There are various ways of measuring the intensity of links between countries. One measure relates to trading links, more particularly to the pattern of exports. In order to obtain an overall view, ties of this kind can be divided into three main groups: links within the Nordic countries; links with the rest of Europe; and links with the world beyond Europe. In order to determine the distribution of inter-Nordic connections, the network of relations between the Nordic countries will be looked at more in detail.

Trade Patterns

Table 11.1 shows the distribution of exports to recipient countries. The dependence of the Nordic countries on the European market is obvious. Over half of all exports in all Nordic countries go to non-Nordic European countries. Trade between the Nordic countries accounts in total

Table 11.1 The Nordic Pattern of Trade 1991

Percentage distribution of exports	(from:)					The Nordic
	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden	Countries
(to:)						
The Nordic countries	20	21	8	19	21	20
Europe excluding the Nordic countries	61	58	68	64	55	59
The World excluding Europe	19	21	24	17	24	21
Percentage Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: *Yearbook of Nordic Statistics 1993*

for little more than a fifth of exports; and in the case of Iceland, the figure is less than ten per cent.

The patterns of trade should be viewed against the background of the economic structure of the Nordic countries. The total of the gross national products of the Nordic countries accounts for approximately 3 per cent of the OECD area and 10 per cent of the European OECD countries. The gross national products of Denmark, Norway, and Finland are roughly equivalent whereas Sweden's economy is roughly twice the size. In economic terms Iceland is only a fraction of the other Nordic countries.

Trade patterns within the Nordic countries are of course determined by the size of the various countries' economies. The dominant position of Sweden is clear. The three great trade routes link Sweden on the one hand with Norway, Denmark, and Finland on the other. The position of Iceland is a peripheral one not only in geographical but also in economic terms. Sweden serves as the centre for foreign trade among the Nordic countries.

All the Nordic economies are strongly dependent on foreign trade. The importance of foreign trade has, moreover, tended to rise. The Nordic countries are too small for the Nordic area to serve as the main market for sales of their goods. The economic ties to Europe are of crucial importance.

Investment Patterns

Since the mid-seventies, foreign investments made by the Nordic countries have been primarily in countries outside the Nordic area. Norway is the exception when it comes to foreign investments made within the Nordic area, as a result of the large-scale investment in the petroleum sector. Non-Nordic companies have also been less inclined than Nordic ones to invest within the Nordic area.

The pattern of inter-Nordic investments shows that Sweden serves as the link between the economies of the Nordic countries. Sweden is the dominant source of Nordic investment in Denmark, Finland and Norway. Finland accounts for a large part of Nordic investment in Sweden.

Companies owned on a joint-Nordic basis are the exception. On the other hand, companies will often have subsidiaries in one or more of the other Nordic countries. The Nordic area plays a relatively important role for the foreign trading of major Norwegian and Finnish companies. Major Swedish companies tend to set their sights to a rather greater extent beyond the Nordic area. The organisational structure of companies shows that there are bilateral links between Finland and Sweden, whereas links between Denmark, Norway, and Sweden are of a more trilateral kind.

Nordic Co-operation

Co-operation between the Nordic countries occurs at many different levels. A more institutionalised form of Nordic political co-operation was started in the years following the Second World War. Its most important bodies are the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The Nordic Council

The Nordic Council is a co-operative agency for the parliaments and governments of the Nordic countries. When the Council started its activities in 1952 Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden were members. Finland joined in 1955, the Faroes and Åland in 1970, and Greenland in 1984. The rules for its co-operative activities are laid down in the Treaty of Helsinki of 1962.

The Nordic Council has an advisory role. Its most important acts are in the form of recommendations and reports made either to the Nordic Council of Ministers or to one or more of the Nordic governments.

The highest decision-making body of the Nordic Council is the plenary session which normally meets twice a year. The location for this assembly rotates between the Nordic countries. The 87 members are appointed by the eight Nordic parliaments in proportion to the strength of the political parties. Since the seventies, the Nordic Council has become more politicised by party. There are now four stable party factions: the Conservatives, the grouping of parties of the Centre, the Social Democrats, and the Left-Wing Socialist group. A number of minor parties, such as the Greens and the protest parties, do not form part of any of these groups.

Members of governments also take part in these sessions. They have the right to speak but no right to vote. Only the appointed members take part in decision-making.

The Nordic Council distinguishes between five main kinds of matters to be dealt with: proposals by its members, proposals by the Council of Ministers and the Nordic governments, reports from the institutions for Nordic co-operation, announcements and recommendations, and questions.

The standing committees of the Council, which meet 5–8 times a year, deal with the main work of the Council. Day to day matters are run during and between sessions by the Presidium. The secretariat of the Presidium, located in Stockholm, employs about 30 civil servants. Each of the eight delegations also has its own permanent secretariat.

The Nordic Council of Ministers

Since 1971 the Nordic Council of Ministers has been a forum for co-operation between the governments of the Nordic countries. Representatives of Åland, the Faroes, and Greenland also participate.

Each Nordic government appoints one of its members as Minister for Nordic Co-operation with responsibility for co-ordinating matters relating to Nordic co-operation at home and with the other Nordic governments.

The ministers concerned are either Ministers for Co-operation or ministers in charge of specific departments. The particular composition

of ministers depends on what issues are being dealt with. Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers and Defence Ministers meet regularly but not within the framework of the Council of Ministers.

Each country has one vote in the Council of Ministers. Unanimous decisions are binding on governments but the unanimity rule means that all the countries enjoy a right of veto. Certain decisions may also require the approval of the parliaments of the countries concerned. Decisions affecting any of the autonomous areas only become binding when the area affected accedes to the decision.

The secretariat of the Council of Ministers is located in Copenhagen and has a staff of approximately one hundred. Part of the real work of Nordic co-operation takes place within the 15 or so committees of public officials. There are also a large number of common institutions, committees, and projects in separate specialist areas. The work carried out by the Council of Ministers is nowadays significantly more comprehensive than that of the Nordic Council.

Western European integration and the revolutionary changes that have taken place in Europe have forced a re-evaluation of the traditional institutions of Nordic co-operation. On the basis of a proposal made by the prime ministers of the Nordic countries, unanimous agreement was reached on a number of changes. The prime ministers will play a more active role in Nordic co-operation. Co-operation will be concentrated on a number of priority areas: culture, education, and research, in particular. The influence of the Nordic Council on the budgetary process will be strengthened.

Practical "Nordism"

There has frequently been a vast gulf between the high-flown aims of Nordic co-operation and the practical results. Several major co-operative projects have failed.

Plans made after the Second World War to abolish customs duties between the Nordic countries and create a Customs Union were never implemented. During the last years of the 1940s a Nordic Defence Alliance was debated, this too was never realised. Towards the end of the sixties negotiations were conducted on a far-reaching process of economic co-operation – "Nordek". No agreement of this kind ever came into effect. Talks held during the eighties on a joint Nordic satellite system for tele-

vision, "Nordsat", were also without result. The Nordic ideal, in all these cases, counted for less than individual national interests.

But there are also a number of examples of successful "Nordism". By the early fifties several barriers to free movement between the countries had been abolished. Nordic residents can travel without a passport or visa within the Nordic countries. The Nordic countries make up a common labour market. All Nordic citizens have the right to look for work in another country and need no work permit to do so; they are also entitled to the same social benefits as each country's own citizens. Nordic co-operation has also brought with it freer traffic and communications and increased the scale of cultural, educational, and academic exchange; "Nordplus" – an exchange program for teachers and students at universities in the Nordic countries, is just one example. Legislation in many areas has been harmonized. Municipal authorities in border areas co-operate on joint matters. An organised program of cross-border regional co-operation has been set up in a number of geographic areas. Recently a cross-border council for the Barents region in the Arctic was established.

Economic Co-operation

Towards the end of the eighties it was apparent that the Nordic countries were faced with a number of economic problems. The growth rate was lower in the Nordic area than in the rest of the OECD countries. The Nordic countries had not managed to combine low unemployment with low inflation; inflation was higher than the OECD average. The rate of savings was also below the average for other industrial countries. The huge scale of the public sector and the high level of taxation accentuated the problems of inefficiency in the Nordic economies.

Although trade between the Nordic countries accounts for approximately a fifth of total Nordic trade, it is the European market that accounts for the bulk of Nordic exports. The future of Nordic industry will therefore be determined mainly outside the Nordic countries. The Nordic area is, nevertheless, very important as the domestic arena in which companies can establish a powerful basis from which to expand into markets beyond the Nordic frontiers. This means that the process of adapting to the internal market of the European Union has a major role to play in the drive for Nordic integration.

The focus of economic co-operation between the Nordic countries is the regular joint meetings of the Nordic Ministers of Finance. This form of co-operation also takes place in committees of experts and working parties. Several plans have been adopted and many of the proposals are concerned with dismantling trade barriers within the Nordic countries.

The Nordic Countries and International Affairs

Each Nordic country faces not only the problem of the tension between national self-determination and international integration but also the question of which international forum best suits it in terms of that very process of integration. The issue facing them all is how the Nordic countries as a unit should fit in to the wider process of international co-operation.

In a number of cases it has been relatively painless to unite “Nordism” and internationalism. All the Nordic countries have long been members of international organisations such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. In international contexts of this kind and in the whole process of international negotiation, the Nordic countries often form a single bloc, and are therefore able to speak with a stronger voice. On the executive of the IMF, for example, the Nordic countries are represented by a single spokesperson; this function rotates between the Nordic countries.

For a long period foreign affairs were kept outside the Nordic Council. It was not until the eighties that Nordic co-operation gained an international dimension. The process of Western European economic, political, and cultural integration together with the developments in Eastern Europe have helped to introduce this international dimension to Nordic co-operation. The Nordic Union started to work together with the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe in a more concerted way in 1990.

The Nordic Countries and Western Europe

It has, however, proved difficult to combine “Nordism” with other forms of international co-operation when it comes to Europe. The mil-

itary alliances and the organisations for economic co-operation of the post-war era have had a divisive effect on the Nordic countries.

Plans for a Nordic Defence League after the Second World War came to nothing. Iceland, Norway, and Denmark joined the Western defence alliance, NATO. Finland signed a treaty of friendship and mutual assistance with the Soviet Union.

When the European Economic Community was formed in 1957, no Nordic country was a member. Instead, the Nordic countries joined the European Free Trade Area which was formed in 1959. Co-operation within EFTA meant that many customs duties on industrial goods were abolished in the sixties.

In 1973 Denmark joined the European Economic Community while the other four Nordic countries remained in EFTA. Customs duties and import restrictions between the European Community and EFTA were gradually abolished. During the eighties the capital markets were also liberalised. However, Danish membership of the EC meant there was an economic and political divide within the Nordic countries. Denmark's orientation towards the Continent was reinforced.

With the revolutionary transformations in eastern and central Europe at the end of the eighties, the security and defence situation was changed. Sweden's objections to European Community membership on the grounds of its neutrality were weakened, and in 1991 Sweden decided to apply for membership of the European Community and European Union. The treaty of friendship, security and mutual assistance between Finland and the Soviet Union was cancelled in 1992 and shortly afterwards Finland decided to seek membership of the EC and the EU. Norway also applied for membership of the EC/EU.

Changes on the international scene have forced each of the Nordic countries to undertake a fundamental reappraisal of its foreign policies. The dissolution of the Soviet Union has meant greater freedom of action for Finland in international affairs. Finland takes part in the consultative committee of NATO. Although Sweden still remains outside the military alliances, its policy of neutrality has lost much of its meaning now that there are no longer two power blocs to be neutral between. By applying for membership of the European Union both Finland and Sweden have indicated their willingness to participate in a European defence and security policy.

Closer European integration has always been a controversial issue in the Nordic countries. Although Sweden, Norway and Iceland have de-

cided to participate in the internal market through the EEA agreement, opinion is sharply divided on the matter of full membership of the European Union. Membership is not on Iceland's agenda. The Faroes and Greenland have already made clear their determination to remain outside both the EC and the EU. Åland is demanding special treatment in the event that Finland becomes part of the EU. The issue of membership in the European Union may intensify political and economic divisions within the Nordic countries.

The Nordic Countries and the Baltic States

The dissolution of the Soviet empire has brought relations between the Baltic states and the Nordic countries once more into the spotlight. There are a large number of historical ties between the Nordic and the Baltic countries. Estonian and Finnish belong to the same family of languages. The provinces bordering the Baltic were linked from early on by thriving commercial ties. The Hanseatic League served as a unifying force during the Middle Ages under the control of German merchants. The Great Power era of the seventeenth century meant that Sweden controlled large parts of the Baltic area. The short period of democracy in the Baltic states between the wars brought with it intensified links with the Nordic countries. In the final phase of the Second World War several thousand Baltic refugees fled to Sweden.

All three Baltic States declared their independence during the spring of 1990. During the process of liberation great importance was attached to strengthening ties with surrounding countries, not least with the Nordic countries. Cooperation between the Nordic and the Baltic countries first developed at an informal, direct level but has subsequently been institutionalised at an official, inter-governmental level.

Diplomatic ties were re-established between the Nordic and the Baltic states as soon as the latter gained their independence in 1991. Bilateral links between the countries form the focus for their efforts at co-operation. The Nordic cooperative agencies have also turned their attention to the Baltic area. The Nordic Council of Ministers is supporting research projects, seminars and exchange programs, for example.

The idea of welcoming the Baltic states as members of the Nordic Council is no longer current. Through the Baltic Council, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have re-established inter-parliamentary forms of co-

operation first developed between the two world wars. The Baltic Council has put its co-operation with the Nordic Council on an institutional basis.

The Baltic area has gained increased importance with the democratisation of Eastern Europe, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the regained independence of the Baltic countries. As yet the new forms of co-operation between the Baltic countries have not been fully developed. At the beginning of the 1990s a series of conferences, seminars and symposia was held to develop new projects and institutions. A frequently quoted slogan refers to the construction of "a new Hanseatic League".

One of these new agencies is the Baltic Area Council, formed at a meeting of foreign ministers in Copenhagen in 1992. The proposal was initiated by the foreign ministers of Germany and Denmark. The nine countries bordering the Baltic are members of the Baltic Area Council: Sweden, Finland, Russia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, Poland, Germany and Denmark together with Norway (but not, however, Iceland).

The Baltic Area Council is designed to function as a forum for coordination across a wide range of areas (economic, environmental and cultural affairs and communication, for example) as well as providing aid to the Eastern European countries during the transition to democracy and the market economy.

The Future

By the beginning of the nineties the outlook for Nordic co-operation seemed very uncertain. There are several factors that suggest that the importance of joint Nordic institutions will diminish. International integration of goods, services, capital, and people takes place nowadays mostly at the European and not at the Nordic level. The European Union continues to divide the Nordic countries into two groups of member and non-member states. Individual Nordic countries are largely responsible for establishing their own direct relations with other countries in the rest of Europe, and this includes the Baltic states. The Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers as well as other joint Nordic agencies are being marginalised in consequence.

However, at the same time there are other factors that would suggest that the Nordic countries as a political unit might gain in importance.

The negotiations on a European Economic Area between the EFTA and EC countries have hastened the process of harmonisation among the Nordic countries. Were all the Nordic states to join the European Union, co-ordinated action on the part of the Nordic countries would give them a comparatively powerful voice in the European institutions. Co-operation at the Nordic level could become an important means of facilitating the adaptation of the Nordic countries to the process of European co-operation.

The Nordic countries would be able to make a very particular contribution of their own to this process based on their historical experiences. The Nordic model constitutes one of many elements in the wider European debate. In the joint programs being put forward by the Nordic countries, a widening of the concept of the Nordic model can be discerned. The focus is no longer only on full employment, ambitious welfare policies, and social equality. Nowadays the emphasis is also on improving the environment, regional re-distribution, better working conditions, equality of opportunity between the sexes, and progress towards democracy in all areas of society.

The Nordic countries today are not a homogeneous unit. There are major economic, defence and security, linguistic, and cultural differences between the Nordic countries. The future seems uncertain, both in relation to the relevance of the Nordic model and the extent of co-operation at Nordic level. A renewal of the political institutions of the Nordic model may be the one factor that will give new life to Nordic community.

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Olof Petersson

The Government and Politics of the Nordic Countries

The Nordic countries are known for developing a particular variety of welfare state. But what are the real lessons to be learnt from the »Nordic Model«? *The Government and Politics of the Nordic Countries* provides an up to date description of elections, political parties, parliaments, governments, bureaucracy, special interest organisations, opinion formation and power structures in the countries concerned and how they are being affected by the process of internationalisation. The book is a translation of *Nordisk politik* and has been fully revised and brought up to date (spring 1994).

Olof Petersson teaches Political Science at the University of Uppsala. He is the author of several books and headed the Study of Power and Democracy in Sweden.

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